Sister Teresa

always yours
George Moore.

SISTER TERESA

BY

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PREFACE

After being engaged for two years on the history of Evelyn Innes, I found I had completed a great pile of MS., and one day it occurred to me to consider the length of this MS. To my surprise I found I had written about 150,000 words, and had only finished the first half of my story. I explained my difficulties to my publisher, suggesting that I should end the chapter I was then writing on what musicians would call 'a full close,' and that half the story should be published under the title of *Evelyn Innes* and half under the title of *Sister Teresa.* My publisher consented, frightened at the thought of a novel of a thousand pages—300,000 words.

I was wrong to yield to the temptation, but the pile of MS. was already high, and I thought how much higher it would be in two more years. True it is that Tolstoi waited until he had finished *War and Peace* before he published it; he even withheld the central idea of the book—the idea which gives it unity—till the last volume.

But though we may admire and envy self-restraint and self-confidence, it does not follow that we possess them. I confess that I was not in possession of them at that time, and I may be so unfortunate that no readers may have the patience to study the book in the sequence that I originally designed. But I will not anticipate such ill-luck. I will hope that it will be understood that this is really the second volume of a novel which is meant to be read under one name and within one cover, and which will perhaps be ultimately presented to the public under the single title of *Evelyn Innes*.

SISTER TERESA

I

SHE was conscious of her indolence: within and without her there was a strange, lifeless calm, a strange inactivity in the air and in her mind. In the landscape and in her there seemed no before and no hereafter. But a glance inwards revealed to her the ripple of some hidden anticipation moving under the sullen surface. The idea of returning to London stirred a little dread in her, yet she felt that for the moment she had seen enough of the convent. For the moment she could assimilate no more of it. The rhythm of the carriage penetrated her indolent body. The thud of the chestnuts' hoofs in the empty road stirred a quiet wonder in her, and she looked into the sunset as she might into a veil.

The mist had gathered in the suburban streets, and over the scraps of waste ground, changing them to blue; and looking into this dim colour and dimly-suggested form, she seemed to become aware of the presence of a phantom life moving on the hither side of her life, dependent upon it, and yet seemingly not concerned by its affairs, occupied by interests and desires exclusively its own. Her perceptions gathered in intensity, and she waited, tremulous and expectant, for the moment seemed to have come for the invisible to become visible. But in spite of her efforts to keep her attention fixed, to exclude the natural, her attention wandered or it lapsed, or the natural slipped in between, intercepting her vision,

and the phantom folk lost their supernatural appearance and took on the likeness of the nuns. She saw the nuns in their convent garden, playing at ball, or in church, sitting in their stalls, turned sideways, with books in their hands. As the carriage entered the Fulham Road, that long, narrow, winding lane, she saw Sister Mary John digging, and she smiled at her strange, brusque ways. Her quaint bird came towards them, hopping over the broken ground, and she remembered how elimination of the spiritual weeds had resulted in other weeds.

As she drove toward London she pondered Sister Mary John's sensuous enthusiasm for her singing. She knew that she appealed to the nun's imagination, and she knew that the Prioress appealed to hers—that she was charmed by a wise, sad nun, by the woman that the nun's veil could not hide, nor an extreme old age. She felt that the Prioress had renounced, whereas the other nuns, or a great many of them, had refused life.

The still autumn evening was like a magic mirror, and looking into it she saw the slow, devotional pose of the old white hands resting on the table edge, and she heard the calm, even voice telling her of the supremacy of the contemplative orders.

As the carriage drove up Grosvenor Place the cries of the pea-fowls in the gardens of Buckingham Palace startled her, and she looked round, terrified to find herself in London again. The carriage turned into Hamilton Place. She was returning to the life of the world, the battle with herself was about to begin again; and though she felt quite sure of herself, the fact of finding Owen waiting for her seemed like an omen, or at least a challenge. He was waiting for her at the head of the stairs. There was a little nervous smile on his lips and an anxious look in his eyes. As she went upstairs to meet him, confidence in God, and the confidence in herself, which her prayers and the prayers of the nuns had given her, appeared in her face, and Owen wondered at the extraordinary beauty which looked at him out of her eyes. She seemed capable of a more exalted passion, of a more intense feeling, and his desire to win her back grew more acute than ever. She seemed to read

his thoughts in his eyes, and lest she should read them completely he said,—

'I did not know you were coming home to-day; I came on the chance of finding you.'

'Well, Owen, I wrote to tell you you were not to come; but it sounds ungracious to tell you so.'

'You said that I was not to come to see you for three months, but you broke your promise. You wrote to say you would not see me again; that liberated me from my promise not to come to see you for three months, isn't that so?'

She did not answer, and he wondered if she were trying to remember why she had written him that cruel letter.

'I am very glad to see you, Owen.'

'Are things different?' he asked. 'Tell me if things are worse, and they are worse if you will not take me back.'

'Owen, you must not speak like that now.'

'And why not now? Where have you come from—is there any secret?'

'There is none.'

'Merat told me she did not know.'

'And you concluded there was a secret. I have come from the convent. I have been in retreat.'

'Eight days shut up in a convent singing psalms and burning incense—I wonder you're here to tell the tale.'

'It is very easy to speak like that; such sarcasms are easy.'

Neither spoke for a long while, and then they spoke of ordinary things, as if they had forgotten that their lives had come into a crisis. Suddenly, like one retaken by an ache which had left him for a while, Owen said,—

'Ah! if I had married you when I first met you. But you would not have been half as happy as you have been if I had set you up at Riversdale and Berkeley Square to entertain the best people, and had loaded you with diamonds. The mistake I made, Evelyn, was not to have allowed you to have children. The only way a man can keep a woman is through her children. I did not think of that at the time —one cannot think of everything. But I did the best for you, Evelyn, didn't I? Say that I did.'

'Yes, Owen, your conduct was better than mine, for you acted according to your lights.'

He sprang to his feet, and taking a Worcester vase from the table he examined its design; and fearing that he would dash it to the ground Evelyn did not say a word; but his irritation passed without the breaking of the jar, and resuming his seat beside her he saw the autumn leaves, and the faintly-flushed sky, and with a sudden pang he remembered that life is passing away while we are arguing how to live it.

'You may struggle for a while, but the passion for the stage will overtake you.'

But this did not seem to him true. He remembered that the new idea had been growing steadily in her for some while, and, though it might not absorb her entirely, the chances were against her returning to the stage. Nor could he overcome the feeling that her talent for the stage was an immediate inheritance whose roots did not go very deep into her nature. Her dramatic talent might be a passing reflection of her mother's temperament. Suddenly she heard him say that it would be the lust of the flesh that would save her from the cloister; it would bring her back to life, to man, maybe to him. And once again he sat down, and with a new set of arguments he tried to convince her she was not intended for a religious life. Merat brought in tea, and the conversation broke down; and after tea, when they were talking of indifferent things, he noticed that a different mood was preparing in her. She sat, as if fascinated, her huddled knees full of temptation, and following her to the end of the sofa he seemed to lose his reason suddenly in her atmosphere. She did not drive him from her, but once looked up pleadingly. He seemed to dread her displeasure, for he merely kissed her hair, which hung loose and thick over her neck, and he took it in his fingers and lifted it from her neck. He thought that to win her his lips must seek to surprise her senses suddenly in her lips, but while holding her face in his hands he was held back by some strange pity, and in that moment of hesitation she recovered her strength to resist him.

'Owen, you must not make love to me; all that is over and done between us. Owen, do not make it impossible for me to see you. I want to love you, dearest, but not as I have loved you; leave go my hands; you have never yet disobeyed me, and if you are violent I shall never, never be able to see you again.'

For a moment his love of her seemed to move from earth to heaven; that is to say, from all that eyes see, that ears hear and the nostrils inhale; and he felt he must not detain her. Her face expressed such purity that he abandoned her hands, compelled by some grave force which he could not explain or contest. So nothing came of this love meeting except the pinning up of some hair which had fallen; and when he looked at her again he was not quite sure that he had not misinterpreted the affectionate emotions which had carried her towards him a moment ago. But whatever his mistake may have been, her manner towards him had changed, and now her face seemed to express sorrow that he could not be to her what she wished him to be, and she seemed to regret that each should be a temptation to the other. She felt that she ought to send him away, but lacking the courage to do so, she asked if he would come into the Park with her, and they walked by the Serpentine, conscious of the melancholy of the autumn evening. And leaning on the balustrade of the bridge, looking into the mist which shrouded the Long Water, he thought of what he had told her of herself, that her artistic instincts were but a passing reflection of her mother's spirit, whereas the true romance of her life was in the sexual instinct.

The stream's banks were shrouded in a thick mist, out of which the tops of the trees emerged. In the middle of the water there was one space free from mist, and two wild ducks with a whirr of wings dropped into the pool of light; they swam a little way, and a moment afterwards were swallowed up by the mist. He was too sad to be irritated by anything she might say, and he allowed her to say that it was impossible to deny the influence of prayer of others without denying the influence of hypnotism and telepathy.

'But what are you going to do? How is all this to end? You are not going to shut yourself up in a convent, nor devote yourself to philanthropic work. You have no plans, I believe, except perhaps to live a chaste life.'

'Owen, I had to change my life. Except for a moment I took no pleasure in anything.'

He noticed how her face became suddenly grave, and that the intimate secret of her nature seemed to rise to her lips when she said that whatever spirituality she might attain to she would attain to through chastity.

'We have only a certain amount of force. A certain amount goes to support life, and the rest we may expend upon a lover, or upon our spiritual life.'

'But this cannot be the last time I shall see you, Evelyn,' he said, when she mentioned that it was growing late and that she must be returning home. 'How shall I live without you, alone in Berkeley Square, nothing to do but to think of my lost happiness?'

'You are lonely because you will not allow anyone to come between you and yourself.'

They were walking towards home, and for a moment he believed it to be his lot to be her husband.

'Will you marry me, Evelyn?'

'Owen, you should have asked me before.'

In that moment it seemed to her too that her destiny was beside her, and she did not dare to look up lest she should see it, and she was mortally afraid of what was happening. For if he had pressed her for a definite 'yes' or 'no' she felt she would never have had the force to resist, particularly if he had said, 'Well, let us go away at once.' If he had pressed an immediate flight, she would have assented, and a fate that would have been quite unlike her would be her fate. But our fate is more like ourselves than we are aware.

It was at that moment that Owen decided that when the door opened he would follow her upstairs, he would say he had forgotten his cigarette-case, any excuse would do, and then in the drawing-room he would overpower the will of the nuns and her will in a kiss. So intent was he on his plans that he could hardly continue the conversation.

'Owen, good-bye,' she said. 'I won't ask you to come up.'

'I have forgotten my cigarette-case.'

'I saw you take it out of your pocket, and you lit a cigarette, do you not remember?'

He searched his pockets and admitted she was right.

The door opened and she entered, hardly pausing on the threshold to say good-bye.

The memory of the summer evening he had taken her away to Paris arose in his mind, and his conduct on that occasion seemed to him to have been much wiser, and he could not recognise the man in the first adventure with the man in the present one. If he had not wavered he would have won her—for a while; and he heard her telling him what suffering chastity is in a woman of her temperament. If he had asked her to go away with him in *The Medusa* her face would have darkened, and on the morrow she would come to him, her face set in iron determination, or would have written him one of those cold, acid letters, which he dreaded even more than the personal interview. He hated suffering, and it was his hatred of suffering which had made him refrain. He could not have acted otherwise; very likely other men could have, but he had never been able to make love to a woman against her will. He seemed on the point of remembering something, and then he began to remember as one remembers a dream; he was not certain whether he were inventing or remembering, but it did seem to him that he had been prevented from making love to Evelyn by some power, gentle and yet irresistible. His reason rebelled against the admission that others had been in the room. But it did seem as if these nuns had intervened. He exclaimed against the folly of his thoughts, and wandered on. He eventually turned into a club in hopes of finding Harding.

II

MERAT had come downstairs to tell her mistress that a pair of stockings was missing. But Evelyn did not answer her, and she hoped the footman would not bring the lamp yet.

'You must have left them at your father's. If you will write to-night . . .'

'No, Merat, I did not leave them at my father's. I left them at the convent.'

She wished her maid to know that her relations with Sir Owen would be different from henceforth, and it seemed to her that a mention of the convent would be sufficient for the moment. Better the truth than ugly rumours that Owen had left her for another woman, or that she had left him for another man. She wished Merat would leave her, but Merat was much interested in her mistress's visit to the convent; and Evelyn was surprised to find that her maid's ideas regarding a vocation were more simple and explicit than her own. 'There are those,' she said, 'who slip away from life when they are very young, before life has fairly caught them, and those who have had a disappointment, and feel there is nothing else for them.'

'But you, miss, you could never live their life; you are too old, or not old enough.'

And when Merat left her, Evelyn considered how she had discovered two instincts in herself, an inveterate sensuality and a sincere aspiration for a spiritual life. Which would survive? As she sat over the fire pondering, there came to her what seemed like a third revelation—that the sexual trouble was but the surface of her nature, that beyond it there was a deeper nature whose depths were yet unsounded. But if she had fallen she would have had to confess, and how could she go to Monsignor and tell him that on the very day she came back from the convent she had nearly yielded herself to Owen. He would lose all faith, all interest in her, and his interest in her meant a great deal to her.

She had escaped, how she did not know, by accident seemingly. On another occasion she might not be so lucky, and she would go through agonies of conscience and eventually confess her sins, for any long returning to her old life was out of the question. So perhaps she had better write to Owen, saying he must not come to see her. But of what use, since she would be sure to meet him at Lady Ascott's? But Lady Ascott would disappear from her life, and her friends too. Yet she had once looked on these people as her life, and on Lady Ascott as a dear and intimate friend. Now she seemed far away, and her people seemed far away, a sort of distant coast-line, and there were others besides Lady Ascott and they all seemed to be receding. There was no reason why she should not see them, nothing forbade her; but she would not know what to say to them now. There were other friends—men. She feared that men still interested her as much as ever; and the fact that she was going to deny herself did not seem to make any difference. Besides Owen and Ulick there were many men whom she liked, whom she had often looked at as possible lovers, men who sent her flowers and books and music, and whom she met by appointment in picture-galleries, men whom she wrote to occasionally, for beyond the single net in which we are caught there is a vaster reticulation. If all these men were to be put away she would receive no more letters—women's letters are from men, as men's letters are from women. For the human animal finds in the opposite sex the greater part of his and her mental life. She had heard Owen say that the arts rose out of sex; that when man ceased to capture woman he cut a reed and blew a tune to win her, and that it was not until he had won her that he began to take an interest in the tune for its own sake.

Her own desire of art had been inseparably linked to her desire to please men. Three days ago she had looked down from the organ loft to see if there were any men among the congregation, knowing she would not sing so well if she were only singing to women.

'But how am I to fill the days?' she thought as she rose from her chair, 'without lovers, without an occupation,

Three parts of my life are gone; nothing remains but religion.'

Hitherto her life had been lived according to rule, and she had enjoyed her life most when the rule that her art had imposed upon her had been severe. Her happiest hours had been those she had spent in Madame Savelli's class-rooms. Then her days had been divided out, and there had been few infractions of the rule. The little interruptions Owen had pleaded for were not frequent, nor did they last long. His interest in her voice had always been so dominant an interest that he had subordinated his pleasures to her voice. It was she who had wished to play truant and had said,—

'But you go away to your shooting and your hunting, to your London friends. I am always a prisoner, and Olive is a strict warder.'

During the five years in which she had practised her art, she had never escaped from the discipline of art; her life had been a routine.

'Religion always seems to fling me into a waste of idleness,' she said aloud, and she remembered that her first qualms of conscience had led her to the part of Fidelio; she did not think she would have learnt the part of Isolde if she not met Ulick. Her love of him was her last artistic inspiration; the thought amused her for a moment, and she walked across the room thinking of the weariness of freedom. As she took down a book, she paused to remember how her first notes were held in view almost from early morning. How, after mid-day, every hour was a preparation for the essential hours. How on her singing days she avoided all that might distract her thoughts from her part. She opened no letters, and spoke very little; and after having dined lightly she read her music.

On the days she was not singing her accompanist came at ten o'clock, and she was with him for at least three hours; and after we have done three hours' work the rest of the day passes almost without our perceiving that it is passing. We have no need to think how we shall spend it; it just spends itself. It sheds itself like seed.

On her off days Owen was ready with some project, a

visit to a picture-gallery, a ride in the country ; and if Owen were not with her, Olive was waiting to take her shopping. The choice of her clothes, and the making of them, used to take a great deal of her time ; henceforth it would take very little of it. She thought of Olive, of Olive with whom she had lived for six years, and who was no more than an appetite for facile amusement. Owen's materialism was deep, but not so deep as Olive's ; in her there was no relaxation, no sighing of the flesh after the spirit when the flesh is weary ; she was the same through and through like a ball of lard. Evelyn remembered that she would have to write and tell her that she had retired from the stage. Olive would not take her dismissal easily, and feeling she could not argue with her, Evelyn turned in her chair and sat looking into the fire. Suddenly it occurred to her that it was Owen who should break the news to Olive, and she wrote asking him to explain that she had left the stage. It was not necessary to say any more ; she thought perhaps it would be as well to add that he must try to dissuade Olive from sending any information to the papers.

The only one of her former friends whose acquaintance she cared to continue was Louise. Louise's lovers did not trouble her ; Louise must look after her own soul. But what would they talk about ? Hitherto their art had always been a source of intimate interest to them. . . . She had given up singing, so what would they talk about ? She might go through Louise's parts with her. But she knew she would not care to do that, nor could they talk about singing. She did not want to hear of music, especially of the music with which she had been associated. So all her friends must go—composers and conductors, tenors and basses, all her fellow artistes at whose rooms she liked to make appointments. All the adventure of rehearsals would henceforth be unknown to her, and all those whom she used to meet at rehearsals, various *dilettante* Bohemians and critics, all would disappear from her life.

She sometimes thought of sending away her piano, for there is something sad in the sight of a person or even of a thing that has absorbed much of our lives, and the sight of her piano and the music scores — the

scores which she knew so well, and which she would never open again—caused her to sigh, to yearn, to look back, and this revelation of her life had been brought about by an idea. If Owen were to come to her with proof that there was no future state it would be just the same! She paused like one in front of a great discovery. We have only to change our ideas to change our friends. Our friends are only a more or less imperfect embodiment of our ideas.

And as she stood by the window watching the decaying foliage in the Park, she realised that the problem of her life was the discovery of an occupation. She had just come from a lunch at Owen Asher's. She had met him a few evenings ago as she came out of a concert-room, whither she had been driven by terror of her lonely drawing-room, rather than by a desire of the music. Owen had spoken to her in the vestibule and she could see that he would always love her, whether she were well or ill, glad or sad, failing or successful. She had perceived this as the crowd jostled past her, and she was touched by it, and had promised to lunch with him. But fearing she would not lunch with him alone, he had mentioned a number of names. She would sooner have lunched with him alone, but she did not dare to say so, and he had invited the usual people, women whom she had once considered her intimate friends, and men with whom she had flirted. She remembered that she had once thought them all clever, and now they seemed to her like the toys the showman winds and allows to run a little way along the pavement before he picks them up. The vivid unreality of these people she attributed to the fact that they lived in the mere surface of life; in the animal sensation rather than in the moral idea; and she reflected that she had not only not been happy, but had never seemed to get even into touch with existence until she had decided that there was a right and a wrong way.

But these women had asked her to dine with them; they had promised to write, and she would have to invent pretexts, and she had no aptitude for the composition of such letters. If she accepted their invitations she would have to talk to them on subjects which did not interest her,

If she were to tell them her ideas—she shrugged her shoulders and walked away from the window. This lunch seemed to have flung her back again. Owen had asked if he might come to see her. He had told her he was going abroad in order that he might forget her, and had asked if he might come again to say good-bye. She hated scenes of parting, but others did not think as she did, and she had given her consent to a last visit. It would have been difficult and disagreeable for her to have refused, but she would have refused if she had not felt singularly sure of herself. Her sex seemed to have fallen from her. For many days she did not seem to know that she was a woman, and feeling sure this visit would prove wearisome she tried to look upon it in the light of a mortification. But from such moods there is always a reaction, and the visit had been an agreeable one. He won her affection in spite of herself. Never had he seemed less hard, less material, and at the end of the week he had won his way into most of his old intimacy. They had been for a walk in the Park and had been to see some pictures, and during the first week of this renewal of their intimacy he neither said nor did anything to which she could raise any objection until one day, after saying he was waiting for a telegram from the yacht, he kissed her on the forehead. He might never see her again, he said, and she thought that it did not matter much as he was leaving. But no telegram came from Marseilles, and his stay in London was indefinitely prolonged. Soon after he produced a text in support of his contention that sin did not begin in a kiss, and he pleaded to be allowed to kiss her on the forehead and on the cheek. She begged him not to, but it is impossible to resist always, and he assured her that such kisses would not trouble her conscience. The opinion of the Fathers on the danger of kisses was debated; he struggled with her and got the better of her in the struggle and the argument. But his success did not prevail. For on the following day he saw, when he came into the room, that there would be but little pleasure in this visit, and regretted his indiscretions.

'You don't mean to say that you are so absurd as to have scruples of conscience about that kiss?'

'Yes, I think I have. You see, it is all true to me, and things can't be at once absurd and true.'

'It is terrible that you should be like this. But let us change the subject. What about that song of mine?'

She looked in the direction of the clock before beginning to sing, and he guessed something liturgical—Benediction? and his hand dropped on her shoulder.

'Are you offended?'

'Not exactly, but I have often told you I do not approve of kisses unless—'

'Unless what?'

'Unless you are going to make love to me, and as that can never be again—'

'You don't see that an affectionate regard may be—'

'I must send you away now.'

'When may I see you again?'

'I'll write.'

He had kissed her, and she knew how kisses ended, at least in her case, and she was determined to dally with temptation no longer. She had been walking about nearly all last night, and she had convinced herself that as she was determined not to go back to her old life, the only thing to do was to do as Monsignor had told her, and to refrain from seeing either Owen or Ulick again. To do this she must put her old life completely aside. She must sell her house in Park Lane and get another which would be more in keeping with her ideas. Above all, she must get some work to do; she could not live without occupation. On all these points no one was so competent to advise her as Monsignor.

'You see, Monsignor, one cannot think of one's soul all day. There is Mass in the morning, and Benediction in the afternoon, and nothing else—neither work nor pleasure.'

He deliberated, and she waited, eager to hear what advice he would give.

'When I advised you to leave the stage, I did not mean you were to abandon art,' and he spoke of Handel and Bach, as she expected he would.

'Well, Monsignor, perhaps you won't understand me at all, and will think me very wilful; but if I am not to sing

the music I made a success in, I don't want to sing at all. I can't do things by halves. I am either on the stage or—'

'In a convent,' he added, smiling, and Evelyn could not help smiling, for she recognised herself in the antithesis; and it was not until she had got up to go that she remembered she had forgotten to ask him to recommend her a solicitor who would negotiate the sale of her house for her, and invest her capital at reasonable interest.

'This is a matter on which I cannot speak off-hand, and I must send you away now. But I will write to you on the subject, probably to-morrow. Come to see me on Friday.'

To see Monsignor, to hear him, even to think of him, was a help to her, and in the course of the interview she decided she would write that night to Owen, telling him he must not come to see her again. She composed her letter as she went along the street, and wrote it the moment she got home. She expected he would send his valet in the course of the morning with a letter, but the only letter that came was one from Monsignor, recommending a solicitor to her, and for three or four days she was busy making arrangements for the sale of her furniture and her pictures, and looking out for a small flat which she could furnish in a simple way.

'You are very lucky,' Monsignor said. 'If Mr Enderwick says you will have four hundred a year you can rely on it, and you will be able to live comfortably and do not a little good. I have been thinking of what you said to me about the need of occupation. I quite agree with you that you cannot live in idleness.'

Returning to the question of concert singing, he begged her to consider the money she could earn, and the good use she could put it to. There were so many deserving cases, really sad cases, which he could bring to her notice; and once we are brought into touch with the poor it is extraordinary the sympathy they discover in our hearts.

'I'm afraid, Monsignor, you are mistaken in me. I do not think I could be of much use in philanthropic work.'

'But, my dear child, you have not tried.'

'You will think me very wicked, Monsignor, but I fear I do not even wish to try—that is not the direction in which my sympathy takes me.'

III

HER pictures, furniture and china were on view at Christie's at the end of November, and all Owen's friends met each other in the rooms and on the staircase.

Lady Ascott sailed in one afternoon, sweeping the floor with a flowing tea-gown, which she held up in front. She wore white satin shoes, and it was debated in distant corners whether she did so from choice or because she had worn them at a party the night before. She was escorted by men of culture of different ages. Her art critic walked on her right hand. He was tall and dark and solemn, and a few years ago he had been good-looking, but lately he had seriously fattened out in the cheeks and in the waist. He strove to ignore the testimony of time by keeping his coat, which was an old one, buttoned, and he still wore the same sized gloves, seven and three-quarters, and his hands looked like little dumplings in them. His eyes were small and malign, and he looked into the corners of the face of the person he was talking to, as he would into the corners of a picture. A lock of coarse black hair trailed across a sallow brow, and he affected an air of aloofness when listening, and there were occasions when he stood apart in carefully-considered attitudes. He was a dealer by nature and a critic by accident. He had taken notes of all cracks and restorations; and he had lately returned from Italy where he had been collecting information for his book—*Bellini, His Life and Works.*

Lady Ascott's musical critic walked on her left. He was a tall, thin, angular man, with a small, meagre, clean-shaven face, and pale eyes, in which a nervous despair floated for a moment, and then vanished, for his manner was high-spirited and cheerful. He spoke in a thin voice which

suggested the ecclesiastic, and his eyes seemed to reflect back ritual, and his dry, rigid manner suggested one to whom doctrine was a necessity—one to whom rule was essential. He had written on Wagner, Palestrina and the plain chant. He had read all the books; he had been librarian in a ducal library, and curator in a museum.

At parties a sudden lassitude often invaded his mind, and he strayed from the conversation to the piano; and when he returned to his lodgings after the party he looked round the room frightened, and hurried to bed hoping to escape from thoughts in sleep.

Lady Ascott's literary critic followed a few yards in the rear, and occasionally in her rapid excursion down the rooms Lady Ascott called to him, addressing a remark to him, which he answered timidly. He had been lately discovered in the depths of a museum, and had not yet caught the manner of Society. He was feeling his way. He was a man of sixty, gaunt, and wrinkled like a pelican about the throat. He meditated, as he walked, on Harding's objections to his article on style. Harding had said he did not believe in the possibility of writing ineptitudes in good style. Harding had said that he had known Hugo, Banville and Tourgueneff and that they had never spoken of style. He had said that the gods do not talk theology: 'they leave theology to the inferior saints and the clergy,' and the critic was distressed in his chocolate-coloured overcoat.

This artistic party was met at the end of the room by a fashionably-dressed young stockbroker in whom Lady Ascott was developing a taste for Aubusson carpets, eighteenth-century prints and Waterford glass. On its way round the room it was met by a fox-hunter, who wore his hair long and looked like a tragic actor, by a politician who played Bach, by a noble earl who shot five thousand head of game every year, and painted three hundred water-colours. In the adjoining room this party increased in numbers. Lady Southwick, whose infidelities to her husband were often prompted by her desire to succour her poor people, joined it, and Evelyn's conversion was discussed by all these fashionable people.

Everyone was anxious to express an opinion; but there

was a general disposition to hear Lady Southwick's opinion, and smiles hovered round the corners of mouths when she spoke of the money Evelyn might have contributed to hospitals and other charities if she remained on the stage. These smiles vanished when she said she could not see anything for Evelyn but a contemplative order. This seemed reasonable, but Lady Ascott said she could not see Evelyn a good little nun to the end of her days, and her art critic enforced this opinion with a suggestion of suicide. A suicide in a convent had never been heard of; and the idea was considered distinctly amusing. There were fish-ponds in the convent gardens, and the nuns might find her floating in the morning—a convent Ophelia! The literary critic, who, till now, had said little, seized this chance to join in the conversation, and strove to redeem his silence by the suggestion that she might leave the convent and proceed to the East in quest of the ultimate learning. He saw the last of her on board a steamer in the Suez Canal. In the fulness of his idea the critic unbuttoned his chocolate overcoat, but just as his audience were beginning to apprehend his idea, Lady Ascott spied Sir Owen at the other end of the room.

Sir Owen's waistcoat was embroidered, and it still went in at the waist. He wore a tiny mauve necktie, and still a little conscious of the assistance his valet had been to him, he walked down the room with a long swinging stride. Everyone prepared an observation which it was hoped would please him. The art and musical critics spoke of the great loss that Art had sustained, Lady Ascott of the loss that Society had sustained, but the literary critic, who did not know Sir Owen, spoke sympathetically of the religious idea. It was expected that Sir Owen would blaspheme, but he was unexpectedly gentle and sad; and eventually he took Lady Southwick round the room, and explained to her that Wedgwood and Hogarth were England's great artists. He pressed a Wedgwood dinner-service upon her, urging that it would be a souvenir of himself and Evelyn. He told her that the satinwood card tables, which he had bought for ten shillings a-piece, would be sold for thirty or forty pounds a-piece, and that night at dinner Lady Southwick raised a

laugh at his expense, so amusingly did she tell how his sentimental affliction would be alleviated if the sale should prove a vindication of his taste.

The remarkable event of the sale was the selling of the Boucher drawing—a woman lying on her stomach, her legs apart, a drawing in red chalk, drawn very freely and in a voluptuous sense which would make it popular. Sir Owen had bought it at the beginning of the year for eighty-seven pounds, and it was thought that it would fetch three times that sum. All Lady Ascott's set crowded into the auction-room to watch Owen Asher bidding for this drawing. The bidding stopped at a hundred and twenty-five pounds, and the auctioneer waited for Sir Owen; his women friends were looking at him; but he went on explaining his theory on the incompatibility of art and empire to a Jew financier, and while he spoke of the Colonies as a Brixton girdle, the drawing was knocked down to a young Russian. Owen cursed the financier and explained how it had all happened, but everyone wanted to know who the young Russian was, and why he had bought the drawing.

And while her furniture and pictures were being sold at Christie's, Evelyn showed a girl, whom she had met at her father's concerts, over her flat. The interest with which this girl had followed the music had attracted Evelyn's attention; she had spoken to her after the concert, and had discovered she was a metal worker. She had given her an order for some electric-light fittings.

'I should like a twist in the middle of the stem like this.'

'I am afraid we could not twist it like this; this twist was done when the iron was hot; we could imitate the twist, but you would hardly like that.'

'Yes, but how did you learn the work?'

'I have only lately taken it up—I go three times a week to a forge in Clerkenwell.'

Evelyn could see that this girl wore the same black dress all the year through, and the same black straw hat. She probably lived in a room which she shared with another girl; very likely they cooked their own food and did without their lunch in order that they might save money

to pay for a subscription for her father's concerts. She saw their lives portioned out in effort to gain their livelihood, and to get now and then an artistic interest. To be with this girl was like the air of the sea-shore after the stale air of London.

At Christmas her moral impulses compelled her to leave her flat and to go to Dulwich to live with her father. She took Merat with her and lived with him for three months; and her whole life was subjected to his wishes. She copied manuscripts for him, and she relieved him of the most wearisome part of his work by undertaking the teaching of the trebles. She played the viola da gamba at his concerts; she sang the old songs; she taught the girls who came to the concerts how to sing the madrigals, and in the evenings she put aside the subject of her thoughts or her book, and gave him her attention. These hours were the hardest, for she had lost all interest in art for art's sake. She sometimes laughed in her weariness, pretending to herself that she was not certain she hated sin as much as she hated this pattern music; sin was human, at least, but the musical arabesques of the sixteenth and seventeeth centuries seemed to her to be divorced from all humanity. She often wondered if her father noticed that Bach irritated her, and she was full of remorse when he took the music away from her, and she implored to be allowed to play it again.

She would not have been able to persevere in the life at Dulwich had it not been for the three days she spent in the convent every week from Saturday until late on Monday, and every Monday it became more difficult to return to the artistic routine of Dowlands. The time was doubtless near when she would not be able to do so any longer, but she could discover no reason for going back to her flat until the nuns lost a further sum of money in Australian securities and the mortgagees threatened foreclosure. Then it became clear that to be of valid help to the nuns she must return to the stage.

She thought of a concert tour in England or America, and was surprised to find herself looking forward to this tour with interest, and when she returned to her flat she sent for her agent. He could not help regretting that she

was not returning to the stage. But the idea of the American tour filled him with enthusiasm, and next morning he sent her a large parcel of music. She cut the string and placed the 'Messiah' on the piano, and played it for about an hour. She could see that it was very beautiful, she could see that, but it did not interest her. Her conversion had not influenced her artistic taste. She took out another score; this time it was 'Elijah,' and Mendelssohn appealed to her even less than Handel. She turned to a modern score and discovered in it all the original ingredients hashed up and kneaded into new forms. Then she took a score by Brahms from the heap. 'In Handel there are beautiful proportions,' she said; 'it is beautiful, like eighteenth-century architecture, but here I can discover neither proportion nor design.' She remembered that Cæsar Franks' music affected her in much the same way. Shrugging her shoulders, she said, 'When I listen I always hear something beautiful, only I don't listen.'

IV

Every morning she said, 'Now I will get up and begin. The moment I begin I shall feel interested in what I am doing, whereas, if I sit by the fire doing nothing, I shall be mad with melancholy before dinner-time.' But she remained reading her paper, and when she rose to her feet she passed the piano and stood by the window, hoping for a visitor. At that moment anyone would have been welcome, and full of contempt for her weakness she yielded to the temptation which the artist spends his life in fighting —the temptation to go and talk to someone. She thought which of her friends she could go to see—Louise? She had been twice to see Louise that week, so she went to Dulwich, but her father was always busy, and feeling like a criminal, she stopped at St Joseph's. She had nothing to confess but idleness, and vowing to mend her life, returned home. She

returned home to sit all the morning recalling her vows, painfully conscious of the presence of her piano. At twelve o'clock she thought she was going to study, but she opened instead the score of 'Fidelio'; when it had been looked through she opened 'Tannhäuser,' and read Elizabeth's music as a wanderer reads a well-known landscape—the hills and the village street he knew when he was a child. The wanderer passes on, and Evelyn closed the score with a sigh, and stood a long while looking into the street, thinking of nothing definitely—that some of these scores were beautiful, that some were ugly, that none meant anything to her. Her thoughts grew more explicit, and she felt that she could only do things from impulse and to please herself. But how would she make her agent understand that the thinking out a scheme whereby a poor widow might be sent to a convalescent home, and a situation found for her daughter, interested her far more than the singing of all these modern religiosities? Her agent would never understand, and to attempt any explanation would be waste of time. Still, she was glad he was coming, and so worn out was she with loneliness that she asked him to stay to tea. When he left she looked round the room, wondering what she was going to do. Her dinner would not be ready for at least two hours, and it seemed that she could not stay in the house. Whom should she go to see—Louise? Louise disliked religion and she looked upon nuns as fools, and an argument with Louise troubled and perplexed Evelyn without changing her. So she went instead to see a philanthropic woman who lived in her neighbourhood. This woman was an excellent journalist and could have earned a considerable income if she had been able to put her own wants before the wants of others. Evelyn was always touched by her simple disinterestedness. She had had six callers that morning and had not been able to do any work. There was the woman from the workhouse who wanted a little tea and sugar; there was the woman who wanted a coal-ticket, and there was the woman who wanted to be advised—her husband had just been sent to gaol, and she had three children dependent upon her.

'And what did you do?'

'I had to think out the circumstances of each case, and see what could be done.'

'But that is just what I cannot do. I can spare the money, I can give it, but I cannot think out a plan as you can to start them afresh.'

'It should be easy for one who can think out the gestures, the intonations of voice of Isolde and Elsa, to design a new career for Patrick Sullivan, who has been turned into the street with his five children because he cannot pay his rent.'

At that moment it seemed to her that she was good for nothing except the singing of operas and being Owen Asher's mistress. She could not learn the oratorios, and she could not think out careers for the many Patrick Sullivans who would present themselves. If she could only find something to do which she could do, and which seemed to her to be worth doing. There was a root of some good in her. She had not known till now that this root was in her. She did not know how she could cultivate it; but if she could separate herself from her old circumstances she thought it might grow.

She went home to her lonely dinner, to a few letters to write, and to a book to read, and it seemed as if every day would be the same as the last. But next day, as she was turning over some old clothes to send to her philanthropic friend for her poor people, Ulick walked into the room. Merat had suddenly announced him, and she had not had time to thrust the bundle under the table. He was, however, too much absorbed in the pleasure of seeing her to notice it.

This was the first meeting for many months. It was their first meeting since she had written to him saying he was not to come and see her. She wished to hear what his life had been in France—what music he had written, and he wished to know what encouragement and help the Church had been to her, and what music she had been singing. For her father had only mentioned that he thought she was going to sing oratorios. But before they could talk of music, they would have to talk of themselves.

She wanted to know if he still loved her, and she hoped he did not love her in a way that would prevent their being friends; and so intent was she to know this that she did not hear what he was saying about the colourlessness of English music and its want of background.

'It is very good of you to come to see me,' she said. 'I'm very glad you've come. This appears very inconsequent, does it not, after the letter I wrote to you?'

She no longer felt as she did when she had last written to him, and he asked her if she wanted to return to the stage, and if she still held to Catholicism. She laughed at the question, so impossible did it seem to her that she could ever be anything else but a Catholic again. She could see that he was a little puzzled, and then she told him how much it had cost her in loneliness to send him away.

'We must live according to our ideas,' he said, 'and it is by living for our ideas, and by suffering for our ideas, that we raise ourselves above our animal nature. I was not angry with you for your letter. It proved to me that there was a deeper nature in you than that of the mere singer.'

These were the first words of sympathy that had been spoken to her since she had altered her life, and she was deeply touched. She told him she feared she had little aptitude for parochial work. She was not of much use to the poor. It was the poor who were of use to her. It was the poor who helped her to live. He said he understood, and he told her how he had given up writing a certain kind of music, because a schism in a certain hermetic society to which he belonged had scattered his audience.

'We all require,' he said, 'a group of people in whom we are in sympathy; we require our ideas about us,' and the little anecdote told her how well they understood each other.

He saw that she stood in need of a friend, and she felt that her life would be lonely without one influence. His spiritual ideas interested her, and through their ideas they became extraordinarily intimate. Each visit was

looked forward to, and she often went to meet him in the Park by appointment, and walking by the Serpentine in the evening they spoke of the life of the body, which he believed to be an incident in the development of the eternal soul. His creed, that God is everywhere, especially in the twilight which gathered in the great trees, did not seem to conflict, though he said it did, with her belief in the sacrament, and he told her she had only to listen to the silence in her own heart to hear God. The spire of Kensington Church shot up above the trees, touching the very heart of the sunset; and he deprecated a feeble human ritual, exalting the ritual of Nature above it. He asked why man should seek God in scrolls rather than in the sky above, and the earth under our feet, and why a foreign land should be more sacred than the earth underfoot. He spoke more excitedly than he had spoken before. He said that her heart would grow grey and that God would desert her in the cloister, and when she asked him what he thought would become of her, if he thought she would become a nun, he said,—

'Only marriage can save you from the cloister. You have liked me, you seem to like me still; will you marry me?'

He waited a moment for her to answer, and then said,—

'We must go away to-night, so that there may be no turning back. You must meet me at nine o'clock at the railway station—we will go to Dulwich.'

'To-night!'

As they walked back through the chill spring twilight he questioned her closely. She had been falling in love with him again, and was feeling lonely, miserable, and what was worse, she thought, very weak. She had to admit that her life was lonely—unbearably lonely he said it must be—and he admired her strength of character. That she had given up a great deal for her ideas did not impress him so much as the fact that she was living for her ideas. 'But what is the use,' she thought, 'in having suffered if I am to break down?' She could see that he sought to overrule her will with his. He said she must promise to go away with him that very night. That promise she could not give.

If she were to marry him her life would be lived among artists and musicians. She would be brought back to all that she had renounced. No, she would not go away with him, she said, as she went upstairs to her room; and she crossed the room certain that she had arrived at an irrevocable decision. Some time passed, and as she went to get a book from the bookcase, she remembered, and with extraordinary intensity, that marriage would give her a hold upon life, and that was what she wanted. She could not continue to live her present life. She was certain of that. Her life seemed like a difficult equation; and after dinner, in spite of the meal, her consciousness increased until she seemed to be trembling in her very entrails.

'In half an hour I shall have to put on my hat—in twenty minutes—in fifteen minutes—in ten minutes I shall have to go.'

The fire began to burn up, and, worn out with thinking, her eyes closed and her brain beat like a pulse. She started in her chair twice, and saw the fire burning very red. Then her eyes closed a third time, and she dreamed she was in a stable where there was a savage horse. So long as the groom remained the horse could not attack her; but suddenly the groom slipped out of the stable, and instantly the horse seized her by the sleeve and held her as a dog might, only with twenty times the power. The stable was divided by a wooden partition, in which there was a door, and it was her object to get behind the door and close it, but the horse held her firmly on the threshold. It seemed to her that the groom had left her to be done to death by the horse, to be trampled and torn by it, and she was unable to imagine any reason why he should have done this. But she saw it was cleverly planned, for her death could not be attributed to him; it would be said that she had foolishly strayed into the stable after he had left.

Her eyes opened, and she sat in a sort of obtuse consciousness, afraid to move, looking into the red glow; and she did not stir, though the fire was burning her legs, until Merat came to ask her if she had any letters for the post.

'Well, Merat,' Evelyn said, 'I wonder what will be the

end of it all. Shall I end my days in a convent? What do you think, Merat, you say you know me so well?'

'I think mademoiselle will go into the convent, but I do not think she will stay in it.'

'Another failure, that would be worst of all. If I once went into a convent, why should I leave it? What do you think would have power to draw me out of it?'

Leaning against the mantelpiece, Merat stood looking at her mistress as at an idol. These little chats were her recompense for the sacrifices she had made so that she might remain in Evelyn's service.

'A cousin of mine, mademoiselle, is going to be professed to-morrow—would you like to see her take the veil?'

Merat described her cousin's people as well-to-do tradespeople in a midland town. Their business prospered, and there was a nice garden at the back of their house, full of lilac bushes, and on Sunday there was always supper, and the young men stayed to supper. The mother being French, the children spoke French and English. Julia played the piano and Emily sang. During Merat's profuse descriptions Evelyn thought not of Julia and Emily, but of Sophie, who had decided to become a Carmelite nun. Why a Carmelite nun? In her own words, because if she were to become a nun, she would like a severe order. She would like her life to be as different from the life of the world as possible. Why did she want this? No one knew—she did not know herself. But she wanted this thing above all other things. She had always been a pious girl, but not more pious than her pious brothers and sisters. She used to romp in the garden on Sunday evenings with the young men. One of the young men had asked her to marry him. She had hesitated at first and then she had refused. Her father had asked her to wait for two years, and she had waited. Young men had come to supper and she had walked with them in the garden, and her voice had been heard laughing. Her sisters had married, and everyone had expected that she would marry. But when the two years her father had asked for were over she had told him that she had not changed. She wished as much as ever to be a Carmelite nun.

V

SPRING was breaking out in the streets—soft white clouds floated at the end of every street, and they drove past green squares. The convent was in a distant suburb, and during the drive there Evelyn hardly spoke. She was far more interested in her own thoughts than in Merat's gossip, and, seeing the sparrows carrying straws into the budding trees, she thought of the girl whose destiny had been revealed to her at eighteen, and who had surrendered life without a sigh, perhaps gladly.

And, seeing lilacs in the convent courtyard, Evelyn wondered if the little sister who had opened the door to them would understand any part of what she was thinking if she were to tell her, or if the cloister had blotted out her human heart.

When they entered the church the candles were being lighted, and on the right of the altar there was an open archway railed off by high rails. The pews were beginning to fill, and while they waited Evelyn thought, 'So a girl is going to renounce the life of the animal—the individual life, the life of conflict. She is led to this, not by instinct, for she renounces the instinctive life; not by the light of wisdom, for she has no wisdom!'

There came a sound of chanting, and looking up they saw the priests and acolytes pass in by a side door; and at the same moment, and by the same door by which Merat and Evelyn had come into the church, the bride came out of the sunlight into the smell of the incense—a healthy-looking girl with flushed cheeks, leaning on her father's arm, and Evelyn thought of Christ as of a tender lover waiting to receive his bride. Behind her followed her mother, and her brothers and sisters, and they sat on some scattered chairs on either side, while the bride, without visible bridegroom, knelt before the altar. Evelyn heard the voice of the priest intone the *Veni Creator*, and the response came from the nuns in thin, quavering notes; so

inexpressibly dreary was the intonation, so like the strewing of ashes, that it seemed to her that her way must be with the sun and the lilacs rather than in the dim church, sickly with incense.

The ritual proceeded for a while, and then Evelyn followed the procession. She was so blinded by excitement that she could not observe anything, and it merely seemed to her that many carried tapers in their hands, and that there were acolytes and priests. She longed to ask what would happen next, but did not dare, so intense was the moment. The procession passed down the aisle and into the courtyard. The doors were wide open, and the procession passed through them into the garden, and Evelyn saw the cloaked nuns holding tapers, and, in the doorway, the prioress, tall and graceful, bending like a mother over the bride kneeling at her feet, begging for admission. The bride's father and mother, her brothers and her sisters, pressed forward to kiss her for the last time, and all that remained of Owen Asher in Evelyn rose in revolt, she wished, in spite of her reason, to snatch the girl from God and give her back to life. Amid the laburnums and the lilac, in the heat of this voluptuous day, the immolation seemed to be pitiful, too awful to be borne.

'I must see her,' Evelyn said; 'she will be able to tell me the secret of her great discovery and how she came to make it.'

She followed Merat through a side door, and through various passages until they came to a bare room, and at the end of the room she saw merely an iron grating, and behind it a Carmelite nun. She pressed forward, eager to ask her why she had done this, to ask what circumstances in her life had driven her to do this, but the rush of questions escaped with her breath, for the middle-class girl had disappeared, and in her place she saw a being, seemingly more spiritual than human. There were traces of tears drying on the girl's hot cheeks, and her look seemed to enfold Evelyn in its sanctification, and it followed her when she drove home in the hansom—and she saw nothing of the world around her. All the links in the chain seemed broken —centuries seemed to have passed, and when she entered

her room she sat down, unable to speak, lost in the contemplation of something great and noble. All the familiar objects in the room seemed strange and unreal, yet she was clearer in her mind than she had ever felt before, and she seemed to see through life for the first time, and, seeing it, she cared nothing for it.

She stood like one alone on an empty island, seeing the house-lined shores from a distance, and she did not awake from her dream till the door opened.

She wore a maroon-coloured dress, and her figure looked very slight in it. She had grown thinner, and her arms were slender in the tight sleeves; white lace fell over her hands, making them seem fragile and beautiful, and Ulick read in her pale, nervous eyes, that she would be led far from him, and she read misery in his while she told him of the nervous irresolution she could not overcome, but she had to tell him why she had not gone to Victoria. And as she told him of her terror, and of the sudden sleepiness which had fallen upon her, she watched his eyes for any trace of anger that might appear in them. But they only reflected the pain in his heart—the pain which he felt for her.

He was dressed in the tweed suit which he wore from the beginning of the year to its end, a loose, well-worn cravat floated about his throat, but his simple dignity made Owen's artificial dignities seem small and almost mean in her present eyes. His hair was tossed over his forehead, and she liked it as he wore it. She liked everything about him, even his clumsy boots, for the idea he represented was so much greater than any externals could be. His clothes seemed but a little shadow. The picture was all sky—the quiet of the sky and the wistfulness of the sky at evening; the sorrow and the pity and the immortality of the sky were reflected in his eyes, at least they were for her; and when she told him how the sublime act she had witnessed that morning had impressed her, he listened to her with a pity for her in his eyes that nearly broke her down. He seemed to her like some woodland creature who, hearing monks chanting in his woodland, divines in some half-conscious way that an idea in which he has no part has come into the world.

VI

The porteress's pretty smile seemed less cheerful than usual, and as soon as Mother Philippa came into the parlour Evelyn divined a serious money trouble.

'But what is the matter, Mother Philippa? You must tell me about it. I can see there is trouble.'

'Well, my dear, to tell you the truth we have no money at all.'

'At all! You must have some money.'

'No; we have none. And Mother Prioress is so determined not to get into debt that she will not let us order anything from the tradespeople, and we have to manage with what we have got in the convent. Of course there are some vegetables and some flour in the house. But we can't go on long like this. We don't mind so much for ourselves, but we are so anxious about Mother Prioress; you know how weak her heart is, and all this anxiety may kill her. Then there are the invalid sisters who ought to have fresh meat.'

Evelyn thought of driving to the Wimbledon butcher and bringing back some joints.

'But, Mother, why did you not let me know before? Of course I will help you.'

'The worst of it is, Evelyn, we want a great deal of help.'

'Well, never mind, I'm ready to give you a great deal of help. . . . As much as I can. Ah, here is the Reverend Mother.'

The door had opened, and the Prioress stood resting, leaning on the door handle. Evelyn was by her side in an instant.

'Thank you, my child, thank you.'

'I have heard of your trouble, Mother. I'm determined to help you, so you must sit down and tell me all about it.'

'Reverend Mother ought not to be about,' said Mother

Philippa. 'On Monday night she was so ill that we had to get up to pray for her.'

'I'm better to-day.'

And speaking, Evelyn thought, very slowly and feebly, the Reverend Mother told Evelyn the amount of their liabilities. The house and grounds had been mortgaged for twenty thousand pounds, and when the interest on this had been paid, the margin they had to live on was not large, and this year it had been reduced unexpectedly.

As she was about to explain this new misfortune, she paused for breath.

'Some other time, dear Mother, you will tell me the details. Now I want to think how I can help you out of your difficulties.'

And Evelyn took the nun's hand and looked into the tired, wan eyes, and she understood quite well how this woman, so firm and resourceful in her own convent, shrank from the trouble which fate had forced upon her with a material world, eager and merciless in its greed, and anxious to acquire valuable property regardless of the sufferings of others.

The weight of debt on the convent surprised her, but she hoped her face had shown no surprise. She had once been offered a large sum of money to go to America, and it seemed to her a heroic adventure to go there to sing the nuns out of debt. But to do this she would have to return to the stage, and she would if she could overcome herself; and in her anxiety to cheer the two elderly and helpless women, who seemed to have become oddly enough dependent upon her, she thought that she would be able to. To relieve their immediate necessities would be easy; she would send them twenty pounds at once. But how to cope with so large a debt she had not the faintest idea at the time. It was not until she was on her way back to London that the idea of a series of concerts in several large towns, beginning in London and ending in Glasgow, occurred to her. She would make at least a couple of thousand pounds in a six months' tour, and this sum she would give to the nuns to hand over to their mortgagees. The nuns were paying four per cent., so next year they would be eighty pounds a year

richer. It could not be that some Catholics would not be found to subscribe; once an example is set it is quickly followed. But next day her agent told her he could not hold out any hope to her of a successful tour before the autumn; during the summer months she would not draw half as much money as she would in September and October. He thought she could not do better than sing the music she was famed for. . . . London was more ready to welcome a new departure than the provinces. The provinces were conservative, and would want to hear what she had sung in London. Her agent left her to discuss the matter with Ulick, who had just come in, and after some consultation they decided to go to Dulwich and refer the matter to Mr Innes.

Her father did not consider whether it was the sensual or the religious idea which had led her back to her art. He merely rejoiced in the fact that she was to return to art, and began to compose a programme for her—Wagner and the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The provinces had not yet heard the old instruments, and he felt sure they would be appreciated. He went to the harpsichord and asked Evelyn to sing, and then went to the piano, and she sang again. He appealed to Ulick, and Ulick agreed with him, but so readily did he agree with her father that Evelyn guessed he was brooding something. He stood looking into space, or sometimes he looked at her with a sad, pitying expression which troubled her. It was the convent that troubled him. He would have had her return to art for some other reason. She could see that he was hostile to the conventual idea, and she wondered why, for she knew no one more truly religious than he.

She had expected he would have tried to dissuade her, but he refrained, and when she told him of the convent, he listened, and on the first opportunity spoke of something else, and she was touched when he said as he bade her good-night,—

'You will want an accompanist; let me be your accompanist; it will save you a good deal of money, and I shall be helping the nuns in my own way.'

The mornings were henceforth passed at the piano.

After lunch they went into the Park, and they talked of all the things in the Park in the late afternoons. It was pretty to stray through the groves, talking alternately of art and religion. At any hour—even if you were to wake Ulick at three o'clock in the morning, he would not complain, if it were to talk of art or metaphysics. He would, there is not the slightest doubt, sit up in bed, and after rubbing his eyes, begin to discuss Wagner's meaning regarding the Valkyrie, or the meaning of the Druids when they said that men had made the world. Evelyn liked to watch his reveries and hear him say that the Druids meant when they said that man had made the world, that he had made it out of his thought. He invented metaphysics and mythologies, as they walked, and love of him awoke in her heart when he explained what Father Railston had tried to explain. The priest had prosaically assured her that she should not expect sensible belief at every hour of the day, that to acquiesce in all the teaching of the Church was sufficient. But Ulick had said that if we believe in the moments when our life reaches its highest point, that is to say, in the moments when our animal nature is at wane, it should matter little to us if we should feel less certain about God in our ordinary, passing life. The conversation passed on, and Ulick told her that he had believed in one God in childhood; he had once believed in Jehovah, and about this great God he imagined a sort of pantheism. Christ had not interested him at that time, and he now understood the Son as a concession to polytheism. Man, he said, alternates between polytheism and monotheism.

'And the Virgin,' she said, 'is another concession, and the canonised saints are further concessions, so that the divine idea may be brought within the reach of simple minds.'

It was July, and the leaves were already beginning to grow crisp, and a yellow tint to come into the green; and she said,—

'We shall never know each other better than we do to-day; our affection can do nothing but decline.'

'My heart, Evelyn, is like a mirror in which nothing changes and nothing passes.'

'But I am spoiling your life; I can give you nothing for your love.'

'You give me all my inspiration—you are the source of all of it.'

'I beseech you,' he said after a long silence, 'do not separate yourself from me because you think that.'

She promised him she would not, and an indefinable sensation of joy passed into their hearts, and it lasted while they looked into the sunny interspaces.

She feared him no longer; it was herself she feared, for though he did not make love to her his gentleness was compelling her, and she repressed the impulse to take his hand, lest to do so should break the love spell of those long summer days. They had reached the summit of their happiness, and both foresaw the day when they would have to begin the descent.

VII

In their long strayings by the Serpentine she often wondered what she should say if they were to meet Owen. He would pass them quickly, with a cynical smile on his lips and in his eyes, for he would think the worst.

Ulick had asked her if he might accompany her on her concert tour, but she had refused, feeling she could not hold out against his tenderness much longer. The moment would have come when she would have thrown herself into his arms. He had not tried to kiss her as Owen had done, and it would have been easy for any other woman to have seen him every day without danger, but she was different. She could resist once, twice, even three times, but the time came when she could resist no longer. Love with her was like one of those poisons which remain in the body; it is not the actual dose which kills, but the accumulation of doses, and she knew that men had again become a feverish curiosity in her.

At Edinburgh the larger part of the stalls was taken up by Lady Ascott's party. Lady Ascott had had a large house party at Thornton Grange, and she brought all her friends to Edinburgh to hear Evelyn. She brought many of the county people with her, and after the concert came to see Evelyn. Evelyn was thinking of the men whom she heard talking behind her, and almost independently of her will she turned from the women who were complimenting her on her singing, and it was only by an effort of will that she engaged in conversation with Lady Ascott or some amiable old gentleman.

The temptation pursued her and kept her awake. She lay on her left side, seeing in the darkness the faces she had seen during the evening. And every day the danger seemed to grow more threatening. She would have abandoned her concert tour had it not been for the nuns—for their sakes she was obliged to go on with it. Every day her danger grew more imminent. Lady Ascott had asked her to Thornton Grange, and after all Lady Ascott had done to make her Edinburgh concert a success she did not see how she could refuse to spend the interval between the Edinburgh and the Glasgow concert with her.

Thornton Grange was thirty miles west of Edinburgh, so it would be on her way to Glasgow, and as she went there she thought of the people she would meet. She would be sure to meet there some of the men whom she had met last autumn when she lunched with Owen, and the women she had met there too, for they went about in gangs. She knew what the party would be like; she knew it all before it began. It would consist principally of an exasperated desire to do something to escape from the tedium of leisure. Everyone would be divided as if the Atlantic divided them, even when they lay in each other's arms; her friendship with which had taught her that physical intimacies are but surface emotions, forgotten as soon as they are satisfied, whereas spiritual intimacies live in the heart; they are part of our eternal life and reach beyond the stars.

Then why was she going to Thornton Grange? Because it was difficult to refuse Lady Ascott's invitation?

Yes, and because she liked to go, and because she was drawn there. She knew these people would weary her; she despised them. She knew that they knew no more of life than animals, but these thoughts were in her brain merely. She felt she had lost control over herself; her brain was on fire, and outside the country was lit up by swift lightnings.

A high wind had been blowing all day, and the storm had begun in the dusk, and when she arrived at the station the coachman could hardly get his horses to face the rain and wind. She took the storm for a sign, but she could not go back now, and she tried to think of something else. She had heard of the trees in the park, and she peered through the wet panes. 'It is a miserable thing,' she thought, 'to linger on the threshold; it is only the daring spirits who pass across and close the door.' But she put these thoughts out of her mind, and for the first time yielded to the temptation to think of the men she was going to meet that night at dinner.

'How are you, my dear Evelyn? I am so glad to see you; you will find some friends here,' said Lady Ascott, who had come forward to meet her.

They were on the threshold of the shadowy drawing-room, and out of a background of rich pictures, china vases, books in little inlaid cases on marble console tables on which stood lamps and tall, shaded candles, Owen came forward to meet her.

'I am so glad to see you, Evelyn; you did not expect me. You are not sorry, I hope?'

She hardly answered. She went past him into the drawing-room, and with a scared look sat down by herself on a sofa as if to watch the card players.

Lady Ascott asked Owen what he thought was the matter with her. He shrugged his shoulders and went towards Evelyn. But at that moment some other guests arrived. They had come from a different station, and were greeted with little cries of facetious intimacy, and amidst a reiteration of Christian names they narrated their journeys, and their narratives were chequered with the names of other friends who had been staying in the houses they had just

come from. It seemed to Evelyn that the desire of these people was to pretend to be all members of one family. Their jokes implied an intimate acquaintance with the idiosyncrasies of a large number of people, and it seemed that they often spoke with a view to giving prominence to this fact. They knew each other's intrigues, mercenary and sensual, and each other's plans for the winter months, and the object of their house parties; their race meetings and intrigues were vanity and distraction. Suddenly Evelyn heard one of the women say of a poet whose acquaintance she had made she was afraid Society would get hold of him and spoil him. 'She's like me,' Evelyn said to herself; 'she sees through it all, but cannot escape from it. I run a little way, and am brought back again.'

And like one watching a revel, she sat apart, hearing the tingling of the temptation in her flesh; and in despair she went up to her room, where Merat was waiting to dress her for dinner. As she stood before the glass she asked herself what was the meaning that lurked in the dress she wore, in the wine and the meats which awaited them.

These people did not meet to exchange ideas. Everything—dress, flowers, wine, food and conversation were but pretexts and stimulants; the pleasure of, consciously or unconsciously, sex was the object of this party.

It was Owen who took her in to dinner, and amid the influence of food, wine, conversation and the scent of the flowers the combat within her grew denser.

After dinner the card players withdrew, and Owen sat beside her telling how this meeting had been devised. Her manner implied acquiescence, and when she was asked to sing she walked to the piano gravely like one who had come to a sudden decision. She sang all that Owen asked her to sing—that song in which lovers sit in the hot July night, under the moon, among flowers that flourished and fell; and that other song in which desire moves mysteriously like wind among tall grasses by the cliff's edge, and nothing else is heard but the vacant pipe of the shepherd.

She had yielded herself, and the sensual intoxication that flowed through her lips thrilled in everyone; and men and

women came forward together to thank her for the pleasure she had given. She was ready to sing again, but Owen excused her, and they went away to sit in the scent of some lilies drooping in a great china vase set on a marquetry table in the library.

The moment had come, and he spoke to her of love, and only of love, and his conversation alternated between descriptions of love's tenderest whisperings to love's violent gratifications, and all he said was interpenetrated with recollections of passionate hours, and she sat listening, not daring to speak, her nervous eyes alone telling him of the flame he was blowing up in her heart. Their hands touched, sometimes their knees, and she was borne, as it were, out of her reason.

The roar of the wind up and down the glen was uncanny to listen to; it moaned in the chimneys and threw itself against the house in swift and determined attacks. Rain was dashed against the window-panes, and Owen and Evelyn looked at each other in alarm. He spoke of the high pines, for an admission of his desire was trembling on his lips. In spite of himself he spoke of the love affairs of one of the women present, and in spite of herself she asked him which woman he was making love to. A sudden thickness came into his throat; their bodies swayed a little, they might have fallen into each other's arms if Lady Ascott had not come upon them, and startled out of her mood, Evelyn looked up and saw Lady Ascott standing by her.

'The women yonder will go on playing cards till one o'clock in the morning, but as you have been travelling I thought you might he tired.'

Lady Ascott took her to her room and stood talking to her for some time, and Merat, who thought she knew every trick and turn of her mistress's mind, had already guessed that she had given Sir Owen permission to visit her, and no shadow of doubt remained when Evelyn said she would not go to bed yet; Merat need not stay, she would undress herself.

When the maid had left the room Evelyn walked a few steps forward, and then leaned against the bed, for she was

taken in a sudden terror of the inevitable. She felt all resistance to be dead in her; she was helpless as one enfolded in a flame. Her brain would not think for her, and between desire and her terror of it questions flashed. 'What did Lady Ascott mean—had she done it on purpose? Would Owen come to her? Did he know her room? After all, it might end in nothing.' Her hands went to her dress to unhook it, but they fell tremblingly. She looked towards the door like one waiting. She took a book and then laid it aside, for she could not fix her thoughts, and she sat looking into the fire, thinking of the delight it would be to hear the handle turn in the door, to see him pass into the room. The moment the door was closed behind him he would take her in his arms and hold her, both speechless with desire.

The storm had abated and there was overhead a large clear space of sky through which the moon was whirling brightly, and in the wind-tossed landscape she seemed to see her own soul, and the vision was so clear and explicit that she drew the curtains back and returned to the fire and sat looking into it, frightened, like one who has seen a ghost.

An hour later she heard the card players in the passage. They went to their rooms, and from that time there was no sound in the house, only the soughing of the wind in the trees outside.

She loved Owen no longer, and if she yielded, an hour's delight would be followed by a miserable terror and despair so abject that she might kill herself. But God seemed far away, and as she lay staring into the darkness images of fierce sensuality crowded upon her, the fever that consumed her was unendurable, her will was being stolen from her, and with the rape of her will her flesh hardened and was thrust forward in burning pulsations. She held her breasts in both hands, and bit her pillow like a neck, and her reason seemed to drift and sicken, and her body was her whole reality. Once more she argued it out. This was desire separated from imaginative passion and therefore sin, even according to Ulick's code of ethics. But she could not think; her only consciousness was of the burning of her blood which would not let her lie down. She got out of

bed and she tried to think of Ulick—of any subject that might distract her thoughts from Owen. He was sleeping but a few yards away, and her door was not locked. She lay down again, wearied by this hot struggle with herself. But memories arose, and like ghosts they passed under the sheets and lay beside her, and she was now too exhausted to repulse them.

Then her eyes closed, and she lay with the temptation in her arms, its breath mixing with her breath. It lay still, like a child, between her breasts, and she lay afraid to move. It mastered her slowly. Opening her eyes she saw Owen in his room waiting for her. The anguish of the struggle was nearly over, and a sweet ease had begun in her; and raising herself up in bed she paused to listen, for voices were singing. It was a sad, wailing song; she seemed to have heard it before, voices singing as they walked in procession. She was not sure whence the voices came—outside or within the house, or if they were echoes borne from afar by the wind, or if they were in her own brain. The voices grew more distinct, and she recognised the hymn—the beautiful *Veni Creator*. One voice was clear and true—to whom was she listening? The voices grew louder, they seemed to come nearer, and whether they were echoes borne on the wind, or memories singing in her own brain, she was not sure. Soon the room was filled with the plain chant, and then, almost without her being aware of any transition, the voices seemed to grow fainter, suddenly, and she heard them in the far distance. She sat on her bed listening, and when she could hear them no longer the hymn continued in her brain, and she could not tell at what point hallucination ended and memory began.

She fell back on her pillow, wondering, and hearing and seeing only the nuns, her lips began to whisper prayers. Suddenly she awoke. It was morning, and lying between dreams and waking thoughts she remembered the miraculous midnight intervention with a strange distinctness. She could not doubt the miracle, and was overcome by the thought of the great danger she had escaped; she thanked God for sending the nuns to help her, and she realised her own unworthiness. She understood that her summer spent

in the Park with Ulick had been a preparation for this breakdown. Their long talks under the trees, their long musical reveries at the piano, and this concert tour, everything had led her to this disaster. She thought of the music she had sung last night, and of how she had sung it—of the house she was staying in, and of its inmates, and she resolved to leave at once. She must abandon what remained of her tour, and this was the sorest part, for the nuns would suffer through her sin. But her first business was to purge herself; she must destroy this terrible sensual beast within her, and she told Merat she was to pack her things and be ready to leave after breakfast.

And amid the glitter of silver dishes, and the savoury odour of kidneys and omelettes, amid the elaborately-dressed people and the pomp of footmen she broke the news to Lady Ascott.

'I am sorry,' she said, 'but I am obliged to leave to-day by an early train.'

'Sir Owen, will you try to persuade her? Get her some omelette and I will get her coffee. Which will you have, dear, tea or coffee?'

There was no train till mid-day, and she could not refuse to go into the garden with Owen.

'You are not leaving?'

'Do not let us go through it all again, Owen.'

But he insisted, and reminding her of her last night's mood—how different she was then—he besought her to tell him what had happened.

'You cannot have been to confession—you did not get out of your bed and run to a priest, did you?'

She smiled; they walked on a few paces, and then she spoke of the weather, for traces of last night's storm were visible everywhere—in the cold air, and in the long chestnut leaves which filled the roadway.

A squirrel cracked a nut and let the shells fall. A blackbird whistled, but stopped when the sun was swallowed up in great clouds again. The sweet peas were worn by the wind, the sunflowers hung, shabby on their decaying stalks, and out of a faint odour of dying mignonette they passed through the wicket into the woods.

On either side of the pathway two robins were singing their rival roundelays.

'But where are you going, Evelyn? You are not going to enter the convent?'

'I am determined, Owen, to separate myself from those whose ideas conflict with mine, that is all.'

'But that is everything.'

'Yes, it is everything, Owen. You see the carriage has come. Good-bye.'

They walked up the drive, and he put her into the carriage, and when it drove away he turned and stood watching the waterfowl swimming in the pool below, stealing mysteriously into the reeds when the guests who walked on the lower terrace approached too close.

'That damned, stupid creed, which has reduced half Europe to decrepitude, has robbed me of her,' he said, as they sat down to lunch, and like one unable to contain himself any longer he told the whole story, how he had discovered her in Dulwich and had taken her to Paris and made a great artist of her. For a moment he was ridiculous, but when he said, 'A time comes in every man's life when all past passions are as nothing, or seem to collect into one supreme passion, which can never change or leave him,' his words awoke an echo in every heart.

Someone suggested that a spiritual message had come to her in a dream, and instances were given. Owen, nervously irascible, denied all belief in omens, portents and visions. The others were not so incredulous, and they got up from the table impressed, and anxious for the moment to learn something of the spiritual life.

'It is all very interesting,' someone said, 'so long as you are not called upon to practise it;' and the remark sufficed to change the conversation, which had been unduly prolonged.

Some of the guests were taken to climb the cliffs which commanded an extensive view; others walked through the woods, and they counted the number of trees which had been blown down.

Evelyn's mysterious departure haunted these pleasure-seekers, and beguiled by the mystery which had collected

in the autumn park, they looked into the shadows; and when they came suddenly upon some patient cattle standing by the hedge side they were obliged to stop, and they gazed perplexed. Unending flights of rooks came through the sky, and the clamour of the wings in the branches was part of the mystery too. They questioned the light of the first star, and the elliptical flight of the bats. Owen, when he went up to his own room to dress for dinner, drew the curtain, and with a strange grief in his heart he stood looking out on the moon-lit world and on the strange silence of the windless night.

VIII

When Owen left Thornton Grange he sent a telegram to Harding asking him to dine with him that night; and sitting alone in their old-fashioned club the men talked of their sentimental lives till nearly midnight.

'At the bottom of your heart you are glad you did not marry her,' Harding said. 'Nature has condemned us to celibacy.'

'So you have often said, my dear fellow; but will you come to Egypt with me at the end of the month?'

The man of letters felt that his life was not with Owen, and Owen sailed from Marseilles alone, resolved to seek forgetfulness of Evelyn in adventure. So he welcomed the storm off the Algerian coast which began his adventures. He penetrated with a caravan to where summer is stationary, and from well to well of brackish water to Egypt, metaphysical and monumental.

His first attempt in water-colours was made on the Euphrates. In Japan he collected some ivories and indifferent prints, and visited many tea houses. In San Francisco he nearly proposed to a beautiful American girl, and in New York he talked so continuously of Evelyn to a Spanish dancer that she left him for a young man with a less brilliant past.

A week after his rupture with the Spaniard he returned home, having been away a little more than a year; and at the beginning of April he was sitting in his house in Berkeley Square, perplexed as to how to employ the rest of his life. Men and women, he reflected, married in order to acquire duties. They did not know that was the reason, theirs was the wisdom of the ages, and from the beginning he had avoided all duties. He had not married because he desired to dedicate his life to self-culture. He had avoided marriage and his relations, and had swept every duty aside lest it should interfere with his life. He had nephews and nieces, but he did not even know their names, and he had asked himself if he should bring them to live with him, but no sooner was the idea conceived than he thrust it aside. The only sacrifice he had allowed to come between him and the world was Evelyn; she had saved him from himself, and that was why he loved her. But even towards Evelyn his conduct had not been what it ought to have been; many times he had left her for shooting and hunting; of course he could not be with her always, but when he went to the bottom of things he had to admit to himself that if he had not been a perfect lover it was because he could not. He had been as kind to her as he knew how. He had done his best.

He took a cigar from a silver box which Evelyn had given him; he possessed a few other relics, a pocket-handkerchief, a pair of shoes and a tortoiseshell comb, and it was always a sad but tender pleasure for him to look at and touch these things. In his secretaire, in a pigeon-hole on the right, were her letters, and one day he counted them over and found there were exactly two hundred and ninety-three; not a large number for a *liaison* that had lasted for six years. Nearly three hundred she had written him, and he had written her many more, and this correspondence, amorous and artistic, had been one of the special pleasures of this *liaison*. He put away the letters, and taking another cigarette he sat dreaming of the dead years, his eyes fixed on her portrait. It had become the familiar spirit of his room, and in this room he was never lonely—the Evelyn that dwelt in his heart he had learnt to think of as an

immortal delight as well as a mortal woman, and this idea he could read in Manet's picture.

The grey background, in which a casual ray of sunlight awoke tints more beautiful than in any eighteenth-century watered silks, delighted the eyes and held the mind prisoner; and out of all this miraculous grey the figure seemed to have arisen like an incantation, seemed to have grown as naturally as a rose grows among its leaves. Out of a grey tint and a rose tint a permanent music had been made, and Owen often remembered the seeming accident which had got him to bring Evelyn to see the great painter, whose genius he had recognised always.

The portrait was one of the most beautiful; it was not as complete as an Old Master, but Owen's connoisseurship rose above such difficulties. Things which the painter had not observed, things which had not interested him, he had omitted; he had not tried to rival the completeness of nature; he had been content to paint a portrait, which, Owen often said to himself, would be like her when the gold had faded from her hair, and no pair of stays would discover her hips.

He had painted the essential, a young woman of genius, who had gone to Paris on the mission of her genius, and in the eyes he had fixed the untamable light of genius, and in the thin small mouth a thirst which no spiritual Paradise could wholly allay. It was all this to Owen, but Owen's friends, who saw only the superficial appearance, said it was merely a very unflattering portrait of an attractive woman.

One morning Evelyn had happened to sit on the edge of a chair in the same attitude as the painter had seen her sit in by the side of her accompanist one morning, and he had told her not to move; remembering her grey shawl, he had hurriedly fetched a shawl and had placed it about her shoulders. And this seemed to most critics a most commonplace and inartistic way of painting the portrait of a great singer. But she was very probable in this picture; her past and perhaps her future was in this disconcerting compound of the commonplace and the rare, and the confusion which this had created in the mind of Owen's friends was aggra-

vated by the strange elliptical execution. The face had been achieved with a shadow and a light, the light faintly gradated with a delicate shade of rose; and in the midst of this almost ungradated colour, the right eye had been drawn without the help of any shadow. In a bad light the picture looked ridiculous, and the loose drawing, which was inseparable from the genius of the painting, fretted the eye, but with a ray of light the beauties of the picture reappeared.

Owen knew well that it proclaimed the room in which it hung to be the room of a man of taste. And with his eyes fixed on the picture, his thoughts wandered back and forward from the past when she was his, to the future when she might be his again. He wondered what she was doing now, where she was, and if she would write to him again; for she sometimes wrote to him, being unwilling, as he thought, to abandon her power over him.

One evening, wondering at his own credulity, he strove to throw his will out to reach her brain, to overpower her will with his, and force her to come to see him. The next post brought him a letter from Evelyn, and though his subsequent experiments in telepathy were not so successful, he retained sufficient belief in the possibilities of influencing another's mind to try again. Having nothing else to do, he strove to cultivate a visionary power, and he sometimes thought that he saw her; but the room or landscape he saw her in soon reverted to some room or landscape familiar to him, and he sat wondering if it were the collective will of the convent which thwarted and rendered him unable to reach and influence Evelyn's.

He began to believe she was dead. He drove the thought out of his mind, but it returned, and he felt that he must get news of her. From no one except Mr Innes could he get news of Evelyn. Six years ago he had gone away with his daughter. But what had he done for Evelyn—he had made her a great success, he had made her an artist. Mr Innes would appreciate that. He remembered, and with satisfaction, that he had asked Evelyn to marry him. His conduct had been irreproachable, and seeing things in a new light he wondered why he had not gone to Mr Innes long ago. Perhaps Mr Innes would help him to get

Evelyn back again, and conscious of his rectitude he went to Dulwich.

'Mr Innes,' he said, as he came into the room before the door had closed behind him, 'I have come to you for news of Evelyn. She never writes to me now, and I am overborne with anxiety.'

'Evelyn is in London, but she has retired from the world, and has asked me not to give her address to anyone, that is why she is not here.'

'I am sorry that I prevent your daughter from coming to live with you; but you can tell her that I will not try to seek her out; and will you ask her to write to me sometimes, and if that is impossible will you write to me? If you will do this, Mr Innes, you will confer an obligation. I know that— But you know the whole story; she has told it to you, and truthfully, no doubt; there was no reason why she should not; moreover, she was always very truthful.'

'Yes; I think I know the whole story, and I am sorry for you.'

They spent the afternoon talking of her, and Owen felt that with her father for an ally he might induce Evelyn to marry him. The afternoon had been a charming one; not once had Mr Innes rebuked him—yes, once, when he had asked him if Evelyn sang as well as her mother. And Owen reflected how strangely her art had been driven out by another instinct.

The idea of inherited tendency at once interested him, and he began to invent for her a religious grandmother. He came of a scientific generation, and the idea of a sudden revelation did not occur to him. If Ulick had suggested it to him—this would have been Ulick's explanation of Evelyn's conversion—Owen would have repudiated it as ridiculous. And as he walked away from Dowlands he wavered between a grandmother and a great-aunt, and the idea did not leave his thoughts until his attention was attracted by the chestnut bloom which was shedding upon the pavement. These trees were to him Evelyn's trees, and he stopped to think of the first time he had seen her cross the road. She wore an old dress. She had a letter in her hand, and she had been ashamed of her house slippers.

But at that moment Ulick, who was going to Dowlands, caught sight of this tall, meditative man, and he hurried to the other side of the street. Owen hurried after him, and encouraged by his success with Mr Innes, he attempted to win Ulick over. He began by asking him if he might walk back with him as far as Dowlands, and on the way there he spoke against doctrinal Christianity and the monastic idea so sympathetically that Ulick was led into the conversation, and he communicated several ideas on the subject.

Owen's appearance was distasteful to Ulick — the varnished boots, the turned-up trousers, though the day was dry, the large shirt cuffs, the scarf pin, and some few other suggestions of careful dressing annoyed Ulick, and he wondered how a man could waste so much time on his appearance. At the same moment Owen wondered at Ulick's rough suit of clothes; they were creased, but they looked well upon him, and Owen was not wholly displeased by Ulick's rough appearance. He could not imitate it, habit was too strong, but he could admire it. There were moments when Owen was broad minded. He understood how Evelyn could admire this young man better than Ulick could understand how she could have liked a man whose chief concern, if not his whole concern, was with things rather than with ideas. It seemed to him difficult to believe that Owen should have any serious love of music. But his belief on this point was subsequently modified by the very sincere admiration which Owen showed for nearly all Ulick's compositions. He talked of them, and with conviction, because he liked them and because it seemed to him of the very first importance that he should see Ulick again. The desire of the moment was with Owen the most important desire, and he was so anxious for Ulick to come to dinner that he pressed him almost indecorously to accept the invitation. To pass the evening with Owen Asher, he knew, would be disagreeable, but Ulick was always prone to find a soul of goodness in evil things; and Owen's sorrow had put him into a favourable light for Ulick's eyes to see him, and Ulick had suddenly begun to think that he might awaken in Owen some spiritual aspiration; and it was in

this absurd hope that he nodded his head when Owen said,—

'Then at a quarter-past eight.'

If he had said eight, the hour would not have brought into view their hostility, which circumstances had, for the moment, hidden from them. It was the quarter after that reminded Ulick that he would have to wear evening clothes, and he wrote to Owen asking that he might be excused going, giving as a reason that he never wore evening clothes. The letter astonished Owen. It was difficult for him to believe that anyone ever sat down to dinner except in evening clothes, at least, anyone whom he could ask to dine with him. But he was so anxious to see Ulick that he wrote a letter saying he might come in any clothes he liked, and he sent his valet with it.

Ulick had said in his letter that he had not a suit of clothes, and the tone of the letter, though polite, showed Owen that Ulick was indifferent to the honour of Sir Owen's friendship. Owen's face darkened for a moment, but he put the thought aside, for the temptation of the moment was always an irresistible temptation for him, and he desired Ulick's company, for he felt he must find someone to whom he could talk of Evelyn, of her beautiful voice, and the mysterious scruples which had led her away from art and love. Moreover, Ulick was an accomplished musician, and he would be able to ask his opinion about some songs he had just finished, in which there were a few passages which Ulick would put right in a moment.

The meeting of the men was very formal. Owen had put on a smoking suit, so that the discrepancy between his appearance and Ulick's would not be too marked, and he asked,—

'Have you been writing much lately, Mr Deane?'

The conversation then turned upon Wagner and Mr Innes's concerts, and a few minutes after the butler announced dinner was ready. They sat down in a shadowy room, with two footmen besides a butler attending upon them. The footmen moved mysteriously in the shadows of the sideboard, obeying signs and whispered words, and it seemed to Ulick as if they were assisting at some strange ritual.

The conversatian halted many times, for both men were thinking of Evelyn, and it seemed to Owen that, for the present, at least, her name must not be mentioned. The butler's voice acquired a strange resonance in the still room ; he offered Ulick many different kinds of wine, and Owen intervened in vain—Ulick only drank water. At last Evelyn's name was mentioned, and the conversation at once became more animated, and it seemed to Ulick that even the servants must feel a relief. Nevertheless, Owen had only mentioned Miss Innes's Elsa, and he passed rapidly on to the inferiority of the tenor, and the inadequacy of the scenery in the second act. But the ice had been broken, and when they left the dining-room and lit their cigarettes, Owen felt that he must speak unconstrainedly.

'But can nothing be done?' he said. 'Why don't you go to her and tell her that in the interests of art she must return to the stage? That is a matter which interests you more than anyone, for are you not writing an opera on the subject of Grania, and who could play Grania but she?'

He was ashamed of his curiosity, for he burned to know if Evelyn had loved Ulick as passionately as she had loved him, and he studied the young man, trying to solve the enigma of personal attraction.

'She talked so much about you,' he said, 'I know she liked you very much,' the words caused him an effort to speak, and yet it was a relief to speak them. 'She liked your opera and was enthusiastic about it. I wish you would use your influence. I think you might persuade her from that infernal convent.'

That he was afraid she would never return to the stage was the only answer Owen could get from Ulick, and as he showed no desire to continue the conversation, Owen told Ulick how Evelyn had studied the part of Leonore. 'She used to sit reading and re-reading the music, until she became possessed of the character, and when she went on the stage, every look, every gesture, every intonation was inspired.'

Owen spoke like one speaking in a dream ; and as if awaking to its echo, Ulick compared Evelyn's spontaneous acting to the beautiful movement of clouds and trees, and to

the growth of flowers, and turning over the leaves of an album Owen read from it an article by a German critic.

'"Her nature intended her for the representation of ideal heroines, whose love is pure, and it does not allow her to depict the violence of physical passion, and the delirium of the senses. She is an artiste of the peaks, whose feet may not descend into the plain and follow its ignominious route"; and then here, "He who has seen her as the spotless spouse of the son of Parsifal standing by the window has assisted at the mystery of the chaste soul awaiting the coming of the predestined lover," and "he who has seen her as Elizabeth ascending the hillside has felt the nostalgia of the skies awaken in his heart." Then he goes on to say that her special genius and her antecedents led her to "Fidelio" and designed her as the perfect embodiment of Leonore's soul, that pure, beautiful soul made wholly of sacrifice and love. But you never saw her as Leonore, so you can form no idea of what she really was.' But seeing that Ulick was far away, he wondered how this ambiguous young man thought of her. He divined Ulick's thoughts very nearly, if allowance be made for the translation, which had necessarily caught something of the tone of his mind. 'He thinks of her as some legendary heroine, some abstraction, and not as a real woman to be looked upon with delight and kissed with rapture.'

So far he was right that Ulick hardly thought of her at all as a woman to be kissed, though he remembered her mouth and recognised that the senses had enabled him to understand a great deal that he would not have otherwise understood. But in him sensual remembrance was now merged in a spiritual glamour. He thought of her as an eternal loveliness in life, one of the immortal essences which, as it put off its vesture of sense and circumstance, as it passed beyond the obscuration of the sensual illusion, he could see more clearly and understand more devoutly. The difference in their present appreciation of her was merely a slight difference in form. She had become to both what the heart ponders and the imagination perceives, rather than what the flesh enjoys.

'I will read to you what she wrote me when she was

studying "Fidelio." "Beethoven's music has nothing in common with the passion of the flesh; it lives in the realms of noble affections, pity, tenderness, love, spiritual yearnings for the life beyond the world, and its joy in the external world is as innocent as a happy child's. It is in this sense classical—it lives and loves and breathes in spheres of feeling and thought removed from the ordinary life of men. Wagner's later works, if we except some scenes from *The Ring*, notably the scenes between Wotan and Brunhilde, is nearer to the life of the senses; its humanity is fresh in us, deep as Brunhilde's, for essential man lives not in the flesh but in the spirit. The desire of the flesh is more necessary to the life of the world than the aspirations of the soul, yet the aspirations of the soul are more human. The root is more necessary to the plant than its flower, but it is by the flower and not by the root that we know it."'

'Is it not amazing that a woman who could think like that should be capable of flinging up her art—the art which I gave her—on account of the preaching of that wooden-headed Mostyn?' Suddenly sitting down, he opened a drawer, and taking out her photograph, he said, 'Here she is as Leonore; but you should have seen her, this gives you no idea of her; but you have not looked at her picture, I suppose it means nothing to you—the most beautiful thing that Manet ever painted—the most beautiful in the room, and there are a great many beautiful things in the room.'

Surprised by a discriminating remark, Owen was encouraged to take Ulick round the room, and explain to him his pictures, his furniture and his china; but their thoughts were not with these things, but with Evelyn, and they were glad when they got back to their armchairs in front of her portrait.

'Yes, she must have been wonderful as Leonore,' Ulick said, waking from his reveries, and getting up from his chair, and forgetful of Owen, he began to walk up and down the room. Owen watched him, silent with anticipation, anxious to hear him tell the tale of his grief. But Ulick paced to and fro, seemingly forgetful of Owen's presence, until at last Owen's patience was over. 'She is mad beyond doubt; no one who was not would give up the stage

because that wooden-headed Mostyn thought it was wrong. Don't you agree with me?' he said.

At last, in reply to Owen's importunities whether he could tell Evelyn's future, he said that she had fallen into an entanglement of that most material of all spiritualities—Catholicism, and he seemed to doubt if she would be able to set herself free for a long time. 'Monsignor's influence will not endure,' he said suddenly. 'Twice she sailed forth, and he or she who adventures twice will adventure a third time.'

'But this third time; what will the third adventure be?'

'We may know that certain things will happen, but we cannot tell how they will happen. After Bran returned from the islands of many delights he was warned that if he set foot on earthly shores he would be turned to dust, so he sailed the ship along the coast of his native land, but did not leave the ship.'

When Ulick had gone Owen sat thinking, wondering what he had meant by Bran who had sailed the ship close to the shore but had not dared to leave the ship. The first adventure was, as Ulick had put it, in quest of earthly experience; the second was in quest of spiritual peace—what would the third be? But it was past two o'clock, and still conjecturing what the third would be he went to bed. He wished these evenings to happen frequently. He was weary of Society, of shooting and hunting and all the pleasures of his class, and whenever he had an evening to spare he sent his valet to Bloomsbury with a note asking Ulick if he would dine with him.

But Ulick could not be persuaded after the third dinner to accept another. Owen strove to shake himself free of his habitual thought and to get nearer to Ulick's. But he had to speak of his shooting, and his mistresses and the parties he went to, and Ulick, when he walked home the third evening from Berkeley Square, understood the aversion which had awaked in Evelyn for the life of things—even the monastery seemed to him to be a welcome refuge from the futility of Berkeley Square.

IX

One day Owen's cabman took a short cut through a slum. Owen hated the way, and as he was about to say so he saw a tall figure in brown holland whom he believed to be Evelyn. He called to her and put up his stick; but before the driver could stop his horse she had passed through a bare door—a grim-looking place, a sort of workshop or factory! But where Evelyn had gone he must follow. The door was opened at once, and he discovered her among a swarm of children. Children swarmed on the staircase—he thought he must be in a school. Raising his voice above the din, he expressed surprise at finding her in such a place; and no sooner had he spoken than he regretted his words, fearing he had displeased her. But she gave him her address, and told him if he would go there she would be with him in about half an hour.

And in the full enjoyment of the accident which had unexpectedly befallen him, he wondered what the flat was like, he thought how she would come into the room, and how their long talk would begin. He was driving along the Bayswater Road, and the world seemed throbbing like his heart; a soft wind carried the foliage to and fro, and the deep blue sky seemed brimmed with love like his heart. The cabman stopped before a new cut stone doorway, and in the lift his excitement increased—first floor, second floor, third, fourth. The lift man pointed out the door. The common brass knocker seemed trivial and unworthy of her. Was Merat still with her? She was, and he would learn from Merat all about Evelyn—if she were as religious as ever—if there were any hope of her going back to the stage; he was anxious to know whom she saw and how she spent her time. But first of all he had to tell where he had met her.

Merat knew that Evelyn had gone to Kelsey Row to arrange about a day in the country for some school children; but she was unable to imagine the accident which had brought Sir Owen to such a slum, and he listened to Merat's tale of her mistress's foolhardiness in going to such places.

Fleas had come back with her, and nastier things, and she feared lest mademoiselle should one day catch a dangerous disease.

'Such a woman as she is, Merat. Her voice and her talent! I don't say I don't admire goodness, but there are others who could do that kind of work better than she.'

He sat with his long legs crossed and his hands clasped, hearing that she went to Mass every morning and that there were few afternoons she did not go to Benediction. All her old friends had dropped away, there was only one she cared to see now—Mademoiselle Helbrun, and Mademoiselle Helbrun was seldom in London.

'But where does she dine?'

'Here, Sir Owen.'

'Alone?'

'Yes, Sir Owen.'

'And she spends all her evenings here, alone?'

'Yes, here, Sir Owen, reading in that chair or writing at that little table. She spends hours and hours quite contented, writing.'

'Does she not see Mr Ulick Dean?'

'Mr Dean comes occasionally to see mademoiselle, but—'

'But what, Merat?'

'Mademoiselle is very much changed, Sir Owen, and Mr Dean knows it, and he says nothing that clashes with her opinions. You understand, Sir Owen; I am sure mademoiselle would like me to speak straightforwardly to you. What I mean is that the opera singer is quite dead in mademoiselle.'

'You think she will never go back to the stage?'

'I don't think so, Sir Owen; it would not be natural after all she has been through.'

'Do you think she will marry?'

'I could not say, Sir Owen.'

'Not Mr Dean?'

Merat shook her head.

'Then what do you think will be the end—there must be an end—the convent?'

'Mademoiselle goes every week to the convent, and spends from Saturday to Monday there.'

'Good heavens!'

He got out of his armchair and walked into the small hall, and, looking round, he wondered how she could live in such discomfort; and he asked Merat if he might see the dining-room.

'This is not what we are used to, is it, Merat? Not quite up to the level of Park Lane.'

They continued to deplore the change that had come over Evelyn. They exaggerated their disapproval in the hope of convincing themselves that they were right and she was wrong, that she was a poor misguided person, worthy of their pity, but they only succeeded in convincing themselves superficially. Even while he insisted on her folly, Owen was aware of something great and noble, and the image which did not define itself in his mind, but passed at the back of it, was of a tall tree which had grown above the original scrub.

Suddenly they heard her latch-key in the door, and when she came into the room he sat looking at her, trying to puzzle out the enigma of the change which, in spite of himself, he could not but admire. She was not cleverer than before, nor more beautiful, but she had gained in character, and he could not hide from himself that her present self was superior to her former self, that she was nearer to the truths of life than when she used to act on the stage.

'I don't think you would ever have understood my love of my poor people if you had not met me in that slum; seeing me there explained more than any amount of conversation.'

He swallowed a dryness out of his throat and said it was more than a year since he had seen her; he spoke of their parting at Thornton Grange, one morning among ruined flowers and blown leaves. That sudden change was more difficult to understand than this gradual change which had come over her between midnight and noon. They had stood talking together the night before, an amorous mood had grown up in her, and he had expected

her to allow him to go to her room. And he had never understood why she had not come—why she was so different the next morning.

He waited for her to answer, and to avoid answering, she asked him where he had been. She had heard he had been round the world, and he told her of the silent Arabs passing from one side of the street to the other seeking the shade, and he found it interesting to tell her of his cry when he got to Egypt,—'Give me a drink of clean water.'

She asked him where he had gone when he left Egypt, and he entered into an account of his travels in Mesopotamia, but he had hardly reached the brick mounds of Babylon when he broke down—he could not talk to her of Mesopotamia, nor of Japan nor America. These places were but shadows, hardly more rememberable than shadows. She was his consciousness of life, he said, and he took her hand; and withdrawing her hand, she told him her present plan was to enter the convent as a postulant so that she might sing every day at Benediction. She hoped to attract attention to the convent, and when its necessities became known, some pious Catholic would come forward and pay the mortgages. Her concert tour had not been a success; she might lose money in a second tour; then the nuns would be dispersed, the house and the chapel would be pulled down, and the trees would be cut, and rows of stiff stucco villas would overlook the Common.

'Yes, I should like to be a nun,' she said, and her face became suddenly absorbed; 'but I am afraid I have not a vocation.'

'And when your postulancy is over you will be a novice—and when your noviceship is over you will pass out of my sight for ever. I shall never see you again; it will be the same as if you were dead.'

She stood looking at him, and he was conscious of the mystery of her character; it seemed to float round her as she sat on the sofa looking at him. He grew frightened—and in the nervous silence he studied the outline of the freckled face.

He had always recognised himself a little in the long straight nose and in the blonde skin, and one of her attrac-

tions for him was a curious sense of some mystic kinship of blood which he could not explain, and from which he could not disentangle himself. It was only in those intense, almost nervous eyes that he did not discover himself. He traced some fancied similarity in the deflecting line of her chin and in her thin hands. And they were alike in their feverish desire of life. She had grasped the elusive shadow with the same obstinate eagerness; and in their hearts was the same passionate melancholy. They lived for the sake of the memory of life rather than for life itself.

'I see,' he said, 'that all this while the convent has been drawing you nearer—absorbing you. You think I don't understand, but I understand all that concerns you. Every time you go there the spell upon you is a little stronger; is not that so?'

'Yes, I think it is. I have been drawn into love of the convent, and I am conscious of its influence and yield to it; the aspect of the nuns—their quiet eyes and their tranquil life—their minds always fixed on one thing—attract me, and, as you say, I am drawn nearer each time.'

'But you once liked the strong, the self-willed—now you seem to like the weak who surrender, not daring to continue the struggle.'

'Yes, I think that is so. It is now the weak who attract me. I have changed in everything. The things that interested me once interest me no longer. Everything is different, that is what you do not seem to understand. You have changed in nothing.'

'Yes, I do understand, but I can't believe that our lives are divided. Think, Evelyn, of the years and years we have been together. Never to see you again—to know you live, yet never to see you!'

'You have not seen me for a year, and you would have lived on just the same if we had not happened to meet in that slum.'

'I went away determined to forget you, Evelyn, but absence has only made you dearer to me. You see Ulick, and Ulick was your lover and you have not sent him away.'

'Ulick is not my lover now.'

'That is no consolation,' he exclaimed passionately; 'better Ulick a thousand times than the convent.'

It was the convent he dreaded and hated, and when the strain of argument became intense, when she answered, 'It is impossible to live with those who hold different ideas; there is neither happiness nor comfort in such relations,' he looked at her despairingly, not able to utter a word, and in pity for him she turned the conversation from herself, and he talked mechanically of indifferent things, hardly aware of what he said; words were as a veil behind which calamity hid itself for a while.

'But, Evelyn, you cannot become a nun; nature forbids it,' he said, starting from his chair.

'How is that?'

'Have you no thought for your father?'

'You mean that I should go to live with him.'

'Of course.'

He told how he had found her father sitting at his lonely dinner.

'I lived with my father all this winter; and I heard of nothing but music all the time I was there.'

'And has music no longer any interest for you? Do none of your old friends interest you? Lady Ascott?'

'I hope I remember them kindly; they were kind to me, as they understood kindness, and they liked me.'

'As they understand liking,' he said, starting to his feet.

'I am sorry, Owen.'

'Your clear duty is by your father's side; any priest will tell you that. There is no use having a religion and not acting up to it. What are you laughing at?'

'Only that it seems odd to hear you telling me my duty is towards my father.'

He sat and argued this point with her for a long while, reminding her and forcing her to admit that she had avoided marriage from the first.

He said the same things over again — things he had said a hundred times before, and when he had said them he felt it would have been better if he had said nothing.

'I must send you away, Owen.'

'Well,' he said at the door, 'I may never see you again, Evelyn. But remember truth is truth from whomever it comes. Monsignor will tell you that you cannot leave your father in his old age.'

X

The truth had come to her from a strange side, but it does not matter from what side the truth comes so long as it is the truth. She had neglected her father during the last year, and now she was planning to leave him for three, four or six months. But he did not seem to care whether she came or stayed away. His ideas seemed to fill his life completely—there seemed no place for her in it. When she went to see him, he was glad to see her, but he never seemed to want her; and Wimbledon was but a few miles from Dulwich; if he wanted her he would be able to go to see her, and she intended to get him a good servant who would look after him and see that he had his meals regularly. But now Owen had awakened a scruple in her, and she could not deny to herself that her place was by her father's side. Yet, to abandon the poor nuns seemed cruel, and she thought she might lay the matter before her father—he alone could say whether he wanted her, and if he did not want her she would be wasted. But he would say he did not want her; he would let her go to the convent because he would not thwart her wishes. Owen had challenged her to lay the matter before Monsignor, and Owen was right; and she smiled as she sat writing to the priest. That Owen and Monsignor should agree on one subject amused her not a little. Next day she went to Monsignor.

She told him that the Prioress had said she would not be able to endure the strain of staying with them as a visitor; and as she would not say that she intended to become a nun, the Prioress had hesitated whether she could accept her under such conditions. To make the Prioress's way a little easier, she had said that her constant visits to the Wimbledon convent had left no doubt in her mind

that true spiritual elevation can only be attained through the cloister. She had admitted that she would like to become a nun if she could realise the ideal which some three or four in the convent seemed to her to have realised—the Prioress, Sister Mary John and Mother Hilda. She knew the nuns very well by this time, and these were the only ones who had reached a high degree of spiritual perfection. The larger number were pious women who had accepted the cloister from commonplace motives. Some had accepted it in order to escape from freedom—to many freedom is irksome and a rule of life a necessity; some few, no doubt, had entered the convent from disappointment.

It seemed strange to Monsignor that the Prioress should accept her as a postulant, knowing that she did not intend to stay in the convent; and Evelyn had to admit that she had said she hoped that six months in the convent would discover a vocation in her.

'And if you find you have a vocation you will leave your father for ever?'

Monsignor spoke of the duty of children towards their parents, and of the age of Mr Innes, and he pointed out that his interest in artistic things rendered him incapable of dealing with the practical affairs of life. He laid stress on the fact that if she were to leave her father and anything were to happen to him she would never be able to forgive herself, nor did he think she would find in the convent any nobler mission than she would find waiting for her in Dulwich. He said that if the Prioress had consented to relax the rule, as she had been advised, and had built a laundry, these monetary difficulties would not have arisen, and Evelyn, whose sympathies were all with the contemplative orders, gathered up her courage and spoke of Martha and Mary; Mary had been content to worship at the feet of Christ; but Martha had fussed about external things, and these, though intended to give him honour, were not so valuable to him as the mere loving worship of Mary. Christ himself had said that Mary had chosen the better part, and was not this a vindication of the contemplative orders? Monsignor

answered that Christ had mixed with the publicans and Pharisees.

She had put her case in his hands, and was going to abide by his decision. She would go to her father, live with him, attend upon him, do all that a daughter should do. She had not realised that her postulancy could not have been more than an experiment. Monsignor had made this clear to her; and, as if to reward her for her obedience to him, she found a letter from her father on her table, asking her to go to the British Museum to copy some music. She had had nothing to do for a long time, and it was a pleasure to spend the morning in the Museum; and she went to Dulwich in the afternoon, delighted with her transcriptions.

And while he praised her copying she waited for an opportunity to tell him she was giving up her flat and coming to live with him.

He played the bar twice over, and asked if she had copied it correctly. Yes, she was sure she had copied it correctly.

'I was beginning to fear that your artistic life was dead, but it will come back to you. I remember the time when a piece of music like this would have interested you. Did it bore you to copy it?'

'I liked to copy it because I was copying it for you. I can see that it reflects a time when men's lives must have been very beautiful.'

Her father was sixty years of age, and he might live until he was eighty. So for twenty years she would play the old music and sing Elizabethan songs; and this was going to be her life, however unlike herself it might seem.

The absurd dish of hard mutton which her father could not eat and forgot to complain about, helped her to understand that the simple duty of seeing he had wholesome food was her duty before all other duties—her supposed duties towards art, and her duty towards the nuns, the duty she had lately invented for herself. Ulick came in after dinner, and she wondered how he could drink the thick mixture which the servant put on the table, calling it coffee. They did not waste much time over it. Ulick had

brought part of his second act with him, and she was asked to sing it. 'Manuscript music at sight,' she said, and though it was Ulick's music she could feel no interest in it. Her thoughts were often carried back to the nuns and she forgot her cue. Her inattention annoyed her father, and she wondered what he and Ulick were arguing about so hotly—about a dramatic situation, she thought, and all the while she sat thinking what Ulick would say when she told him that she had been intending to enter a convent for six months. She remembered how sympathetic he had been when he returned from Ireland; she could not think of him otherwise than as sympathetic; but the monastic ideal conflicted as much with his ideas as it did with Owen's tastes.

They were going back to London together, and on the way back she would tell him.

'I cannot wait another minute,' she said, interrupting the conversation, 'I shall miss my last train.' Mr Innes wished her to stay, but she felt she must confide to Ulick her decision to live with her father and leave the convent to the mercy of Providence.

They hurried away; and he felt she had something to confide to him, and she told him the moment they were outside what had happened.

He took her hands, and he held them, but he held them so gently and looked at her so fondly that she felt his gentleness to be the most exquisite thing in the world.

'Ulick, you did not hear me; I said I was sorry to abandon the nuns, I'm going to live with father.'

'You will go to your father for a while; you will do all you can to live with him, but something is drawing you from him, Evelyn; your life is not with him, and we cannot live except where our life is.'

He addressed her earnestly about her soul, saying that the grey pieties of the cloister could not enclose all there is of God on earth for her. And becoming suddenly impassioned, he spoke with scorn of those who renounce a great deal in order to gain a little; and he told her that she had been appointed to express spiritual

truths in art, and that she had done this with extraordinary power and purity, and that she made a great mistake in forsaking the higher medium for the lower.

He asked her why she believed that God was more in the host on the altar than in the cup of this great lily, and leaning over a pretty paling they held the flower in their hands. She might have answered, and she was minded to answer, that if we believe God is everywhere we hardly believe that he is anywhere. But she refrained from argument, knowing it to be useless, and she liked to hear him, even when she did not agree with him, and with his wide grey eyes looking at her earnestly, he spoke of the great joy there is in flinging off the fear of creeds and living in our spiritual instincts and in our bodily instincts; and he asked her if she did not think she could serve God by tendance on flowers, and by tendernesses to the beasts in the fields and the beasts by the hearth.

She wished he would forget the convent, she wished to forget it herself; it were better to do so since she could never enter it. She was thinking now of the beauty of the night, and of him, and of his ideas, which, though they were not hers, were near enough to her to be appreciated by her; for what Ulick said might easily have been said by Saint Francis d'Assisi.

As they walked along the moonlit road a little of his music came back to her, and she tried to remember it, but it was hardly rememberable. But it pleased him to hear her try to remember it, it pleased them to sit on a bench and try to read the score by the light of the moon. The blossoming branches above them showered white dust upon the manuscript in their hands.

Art was to Ulick what it had become to Evelyn, a means rather than an end, and seeing her soul in peril he could not talk to her of his music, obsessed as his imagination was by the thought that she was going to lose her soul in abstinences and rituals.

'I think you would sooner see me dead, Ulick, than in a convent.'

'Many times; there is something unspeakably painful in the death of a soul.'

'I know what you mean, that piety is not sufficient. Many nuns lose themselves in mechanical pieties.'

'Since life has been given to us it is given to us for acceptance and not for refusal. You will lose your soul, Evelyn, by stripping yourself of your womanhood which God gave you to serve Him with, and by renouncing your art which was given you that you might reveal Him to others. You will lose your soul by seeking God in prayer-books rather than in the stars, and by seeking Him in scrolls rather than in the sunset and in the morning winds. The convent is an unspeakable degradation of self, and therefore a degradation of God. Nothing fills me with such terror as the convent.'

She tried to speak to him of his music, but he only listened fo a moment.

'Musi he said, 'is only a medium, the soul is the important ig.'

To keep her soul he said she must fly from the city where men lose their souls in the rituals of materialism. He must go with her to the pure country, to the woods and to the places where the invisible ones whom the Druids knew ceaselessly ascend and descend from earth to heaven, and heaven to earth, in flame-coloured spirals. He told her he knew of a house by a lake shore, and there they might live in communion with Nature, and in the fading lights, and in the quiet hollows of the woods she would learn more of God than she could in the convent. In that house they would live, and their child, if the Gods gave them one, would unfold among the influences of music and love and long traditions.

'Wandering in the woods and underneath the boughs we shall know that the great immortal presences are by us, and the peace they instil into our hearts will be the proof that they applaud our flight from priests and creeds.'

Every star that the eye can see was visible that night, and the interspaces were filled with a pale bloom, the light of stars so distant that their light is but a milky whiteness on the sky.

Nothing had been said for some while, and Ulick wondered if what he had said had influenced her in the

least, and he watched for some sign; but she sat without speaking, her eyes fixed on the sky, lost in contemplation of the extraordinary diagram extending into space without end. Her thoughts returned suddenly from the infinite space, and she said,—

'I shall always consider, Ulick, that the convent ideal is the highest, and that they are wisest who choose it.'

'But you give no reason,' he answered.

'Everything is faith in the end,' she said; 'all things come to be matters of faith.'

They had missed their last train, and she was glad of it. She said she would not go back to Dowlands, for on this dry, windless night she would enjoy the long walk under the stars, and he must go on telling her his dreams, his ideas, and his visions.

XI

One morning at the end of the summer her father came to her with a letter in his hand.

'It is from Rome. You will never guess what it is about. It is from the Pope asking me to go to Rome to reform the singing of the papal choir.'

They sat down to consider the matter, and when everything had been said they talked it all over again. The invitation had come through Monsignor; no one else believed in the reformation of ecclesiastical art, no one else cared.

Walking to and fro, sometimes stopping to look out of the window, Mr Innes spoke of the opposition his ideas would meet with in Rome. But he would be given a free hand, otherwise what would be the use of bringing him all the way from London?

'When do you go to Rome?'

'Go? Well, I suppose at once.'

He had read no more than the first page of the Cardinal's letter, and appeared unable to collect his thoughts sufficiently to read the somewhat difficult handwriting. Evelyn took the letter out of his hand, and when she read

that it was not necessary for him to go to Rome before the autumn a shade of disappointment passed over his face; he would have preferred that the Cardinal had said that he must be in Rome in forty-eight hours.

Then, as if ashamed of his egoism, he asked her when she was going back to the stage. The naïveté of the question raised a smile to her lips, and he said,—

'Oh, I know you won't go back to the stage; but I met Hermann Goetze the other day, and he said he would engage you, that is why I asked.' And he stood looking at her, his thoughts divided between her and his appointment.

'Yes, father dear, I feel I am a great failure, and I am sure I wish I were different; but you see one can't change.'

She stood thinking of the day she had told him she was going away with Owen. They were nearer to each other then than now; and his joy at his appointment reminded her of her delight the day Madame Savelli had told her she had a beautiful voice.

'But, Evelyn, what about the American tour? You could easily make the money the nuns need in America.'

'I should like to go to Rome with you, dear.'

'Well that would be very nice, and I might give some concerts of the old music in Rome.'

'We must never be separated again, and I shall be able to help you with your music.'

He seemed to be in Rome already; she could read in his face that he was thinking of the choir that awaited the rule of his baton. And very soon he began to imagine strange intrigues, conspiracies of cardinals to keep him from coming to Rome.

'But, Evelyn, there is no reason why we should do the journey together; there is this house to be sold, and you will have to get rid of your flat. Somebody must be here to look after things; I cannot stay, I must be in Rome next week. Besides, I am going to stay in Rome with the friars. You would not like to stay in an hotel alone, and it would be expensive. Far better to wait until I find rooms for you. You are in no hurry to get to Rome, I suppose? The autumn is the better time—early spring the best time of all. But why do you stand looking at me? You are afraid you

will be lonely? Then come with me; we can put this business into the hands of an agent.'

She tried to put back her joy but her heart was overflowing. She was going to the convent for a while. Her escape had come about of itself, and it pleased her to look upon her father's appointment as miraculous. She could not find a protest, her lips seemed sealed, to see him was to know that he was determined to go to Rome, and at once; and she tried to silence her conscience by packing his clothes, by arranging his journey for him, by giving him a list of the places where he might dine and breakfast, and where he might break the journey if he pleased. He would have to go straight through on account of the harpsichord, and she was afraid the carriage of it before he reached Rome would nearly equal the price of the instrument.

He superintended the packing of his viols and lutes, but if it had not been for her care he might have forgotten his portmanteau. She packed it herself and she saw that it was labelled, while he looked after the musical part of his luggage.

Having told him about Avignon, she looked up and down the platform, and thought she had forgotten nothing; and while she told him that each case had been carefully labelled, the train began to steam out of the station. She might have spoken to the guard. But he only went as far as Dover. The guard to speak to was the guard of the train from Paris to Avignon. She knew the length of the journey, and her father had promised to take a sleeping-car.

Rome is so beautiful in the autumn, and Owen had only shown her pagan Rome; there was also a Christian Rome, and she began to consider her own journey there. She was bringing with her all her father's books, and they would weigh a great deal, and some silver and pictures. Almost the last words he had spoken were about her mother's picture, and thinking of them, she remembered his letter to Owen Asher six years ago:—

'I will arrive about nine with the big harpsichord and Evelyn.'

She liked him none the less for his absorption in his art; she envied him rather, and she went to Dowlands thinking of the great case the harpsichord was packed in and

the difficulties that would arise at every frontier town. It had been packed in the music-room, and a charwoman was sweeping the litter away when Evelyn entered. She spoke a few words to the woman and walked through the empty rooms thinking of the passing of Dowlands. Dowlands had played quite a little part in the history of art ; it had been very individual, and some day she thought someone would write its history. It would be a very interesting history—her father, her mother and herself. She threw the windows open and let in the air. These were her mother's class-rooms, and she remembered how she used to sit on the stairs listening to the singing, and how pleased her mother had been one day when she said, though she was only four at the time, 'But, mother, that lady can't sing at all.' A shelf in the store-room reminded her of the time when she used to wonder if anyone had ever eaten as many apples as she wanted to eat, and a patch in an old brocaded chair of her mother's maid—a discreet woman who never made any definite statement, but who was full of insinuations.

She found two Chelsea figures which she had not seen for many years in a forgotten corner, and she tried to remember if the old servant had ever mentioned them to her. The shepherdess had lost an arm, and the bower the shepherd stood in was also a little broken ; perhaps that was why they had been put away in the storeroom. They were very pretty figures, but she would not take them to Rome. Her father had evidently had them put away.

She suddenly discovered a book which they had been looking for for many years, a book by Morley on the singing of the plain chant ; and the number of pictures dismayed her. Every picture represented a musician playing some sort of old instrument, and so long as these were correctly drawn Mr Innes's artistic taste was satisfied. He had given her explicit instructions regarding all these pictures, indeed for some time he had been uncertain if he would not take them with him. But Evelyn had at length dissuaded him by exaggerating the cost, and by promising not to forget anything.

The portrait of our father or our mother is a sort of crystal ball into which we look in the hope of discovering

our destiny, and Evelyn looked a long while on her mother's cold and resolute face. It was exactly as she remembered her—there was the thin wide mouth, there were the cold eyes, and she could hear the smooth, even voice, and she remembered how she had often wondered why so many men had been in love with her mother. Her mother had always seemed to her stern and cold, the opposite to what she thought she was herself, though sometimes she fancied she was a little cold. It was from her mother she had got her voice—maybe her temperament.

She turned away from the portrait, perplexed, and stood listening to the woman who was sweeping; and feeling she must talk to someone, she told her what she was to say to the auctioneer who would call next morning.

Most of her furniture had been sold at Christie's, and the few things that were left she had resolved to sell. She knew how little influence circumstance has on the mind—nevertheless, she wished to rid herself of everything that reminded her of her dead life. She had thought of taking her piano to the convent; it was a beautiful instrument and the nuns would be glad of it, but she could not bring herself to take it with her. Merat came with a heap of papers, and said,—

'Will you look through these, mademoiselle, and see if they can be destroyed?'

She glanced at them and threw them into the grate, and there was danger of the kitchen chimney catching fire, so great was the flare of the papers.

It was sad to think that she would never wear any pretty underclothes again, nor any evening dresses. One of her stage dresses remained, and Merat asked for it, saying, 'Give me this one, mademoiselle; I saw you wear it in "Lohengrin."' Merat said she would keep the dress Evelyn had worn at Owen Asher's ball two years ago. She was more than kind—she was an affectionate human being, and Evelyn was much touched.

She had worn this hat the last time she had walked with Owen in the Park, and she remembered having worn the one with the blue feather the evening she and Owen

had stood looking across the Long Water. Merat could not think how the feather had got broken. There was a hat she had not worn for many years; it took her back to St Petersburg, to one long summer evening on a hill-top overlooking the Neva. She had met a young man there by appointment; they had sat looking at the distant shipping, and he had admired this hat, and she could not think why she had never worn it again.

One day a man came to buy her clothes. He offered ten shillings apiece for her dresses. Merat protested, and he produced a sack and threw her dresses in without even thinking of rolling them up.

Three days after her furniture, her books and her china were sold by auction. Ulick bought an inkstand and a score of 'Parsifal,' and a china bowl. She could see he was very much moved, and when the Jews began to bid for her writing-table, he said, 'Why should we stay here? The sun is shining, let us go into the Park.'

When they returned the workmen were removing the furniture, and Evelyn remembered the time had come when they must say good-bye.

'Merat will call me a hansom. I must get to the convent before five.'

'Did I not consent to go and live with my father, and how do you explain my father's appointment? Does it not look as if the Gods had had a hand in it?'

With a little humour in his voice, which made his sadness appear all the more real, he said,—

'I cannot believe the Gods have much to do with convents. My Gods, at least, are only concerned with the earth, the air, and the souls of those who surrender themselves up to these.'

'Perhaps you are right,' she said. 'We are our own Gods. Now I must really go. Will you carry my portmanteau downstairs for me?'

Merat came downstairs with a parasol; but parasols were not conventual, and Merat said she would keep it till mademoiselle came out of the convent, for Merat had agreed to go into another situation only upon the condition that she might return to Evelyn when she came out of the convent.

She waved her hand to Ulick, and he seemed so sorry for her that it seemed very harsh for her to be glad, yet she was glad. Providence was deciding for her. Sooner or later she would be a nun. Now that she was on her way to the convent she was quite happy.

She wished that the next few days were over. Then she would have settled down in her work, and she began to think of the music she would sing, and of the pieces which would be most popular.

XII

During the winter and spring she had been kept waiting many times in the convent parlour, but this time the Prioress did not keep her waiting. She passed suddenly into the room, and taking Evelyn's hand in hers, kissed her, in convent fashion, on both cheeks.

'So you have really come to us, Evelyn,' she said, 'you are really going to be one of my children?'

'Well, I have come to try, Reverend Mother.'

'But tell me, Evelyn,' said the little old nun, laying her hand on Evelyn's knee, and looking straight into her face, 'are you quite happy at coming?'

'Yes, I am quite happy, for I know that I am doing what I was appointed to do, and there is always happiness in doing that. I'm not frightened as I used to be. I lived in a state of fear, but to-day I don't feel afraid, though I may be coming here for good.'

'Indeed, I hope you are; and I may tell you I never wished any postulant to succeed as I wish you to.'

'Dear Reverend Mother, you are much too kind to me, I shall never deserve all your kindness; but a vocation is such a mysterious thing. I have come here because I feel that God has sent me to help you and—well, because I feel that outside the convent there is nothing to hold on to.'

She wondered at her own instability of character, and this very instability in the next moment seemed to her like a more elaborate design of life than she had imagined. Looking down the road which had brought her to the present

moment of her life, many things which had seemed devious and tangled now seemed simple and plain. She must, just as the Reverend Mother said, put herself into the hands of God ; and she listened, deeply interested, for the Prioress said that very often those who least desired a vocation were irresistibly called to a religious life.

The old nun spoke out of the remembrance of a long life lived and meditated. Her pale blue eyes were fixed on Evelyn, and they looked so weary with wisdom that Evelyn watched them, striving to read in them the secret, the death of some loved one ; and in striving to pierce the enigma she felt herself drawn into a new influence. The sensation was not unknown to her, and she remembered suddenly Lady Duckle and the French café.

'You must not allow yourself, my dear child, to think that you will not succeed. We shall all pray for you, and I feel that the will of Heaven is that you should succeed.'

Mother Hilda and Mother Philippa came in ; and they, too, kissed her affectionately, and their manner showed her that they knew she had decided to enter the novitiate ; they treated her as a member of the community, but she could see they were not of one mind. The Prioress and Mother Philippa had been in favour of admitting her ; Mother Hilda seemed a little doubtful.

That very morning Mother Hilda had asked if it were wise to admit a girl into the novitiate who confessed that she was entering the religious life somewhat as an experiment. Even with all that was at stake, was not the risk too great ? Might not Miss Innes's presence have a demoralising effect on the other novices—simple, pious girls with no knowledge of the world ? And what good would her money be to them if the spirit of the house were to suffer ? But her scruples had been overborne by the Prioress, and her objection that she would find Evelyn's moods very hard to understand was not entertained by the Prioress.

The Prioress was aware of her personal influence over others, and she did not believe that she might fail to mould Evelyn according to her idea. Mother Philippa's motherly heart had been won by the singer the first time

they had walked together up and down St Peter's Path. Her perception of Evelyn's past life was less clear than Mother Hilda's, but she divined a lonely soul, and had gone forth to meet her on the road, as it were; and it was characteristic of her to think that all things came right in the end. Moreover, they would pray, and her regret, if she had a regret, was that her pleasant little chats with Evelyn in the parlour must now come to an end; and she thought of the rare opportunities she would have of talking to her during her noviceship. All they were thinking about her seemed afloat in the manner of the three nuns as they gathered round their new Sister. Mother Hilda diffident, Mother Philippa expansive, and the Prioress confident in the strength of her wisdom.

'So you have decided to enter the religious life?' Mother Hilda asked, with a note of insistence in her quiet voice.

'I have come to try,' Evelyn said, 'and I am going to stay, if my father does not call me to Rome.'

'I have not told you,' said Mother Philippa, 'how delighted I am that you have come. I always believed you would come, didn't I, Reverend Mother? and I began to pray for it long before anyone else. I seemed to see the hand of Providence in your coming here. We shall have your beautiful voice to sing for us every day at Benediction. But we must not pay you compliments now you are going to be a nun. Do have some cake, my dear. You look tired after your long drive;' and the kind old nun began fussing round the tea things.

Suddenly it seemed that there was nothing more to say, and the Prioress put the question to Evelyn if she would prefer to be a visitor until to-morrow, or to go into the novitiate at once. Evelyn cried impulsively that she would like to begin at once, and the Reverend Mother asked Mother Hilda to take her charge to her cell.

'And, Mother Philippa, will you see that Evelyn's box is sent upstairs at once? You will have just time, Evelyn, to get into your dress and veil before supper; it is half-past five.'

She followed Mother Hilda into the hall, and through the swing door, past which she had never been, and

down the short broad corridor, out of which the main rooms of the ground floor opened.

'That is the refectory,' Mother Hilda said; and Evelyn saw the long narrow tables and tin plates; 'and this,' Mother Hilda added, turning to a little winding staircase built in an angle of the passage, 'is the way to the novitiate.'

At the top of the staircase there was a short passage, with a door at the further end, and several doors on either side. They were of polished pine, and not of mahogany, and she saw that now they had left the Georgian house, and that this was the new wing.

'That is the novitiate at the end of the passage, and these are the novices' cells. You are to be next to me.'

The little narrow iron bedstead, without curtains and covered with a check cotton counterpane, nearly filled the space, and there was nothing else in the room save a wooden chair, a small washstand near the window, with a cupboard underneath. It was in this cupboard she would keep her clothes. The colourless, distempered walls were bare, save for the crucifix over the bed, and the bare window did not look over the garden and the Surrey hills, but northward towards a tall bank of trees, and the apse of the church partly intercepted the view.

Reading in her silence some inward disappointment, Mother Hilda thought she had better give Evelyn something to do at once.

'Don't you think, Evelyn, you had better unpack your things? Shall I help you?'

'Thank you; but I have only a few things, just what you told me. The greater part of my box is full of music.'

She unfolded her little convent trousseau before the eyes of the Mother Mistress. Her calico nightdress, so plain that she had had to have it made for her; and Merat had nearly wept at the idea of mademoiselle wearing anything so coarse. Her petticoats were frill-less, but on unpacking her black merino dress she discovered that Merat at the last moment had added dainty little velvet cuffs, and Evelyn, in her desire to immolate her vanity on the very threshold of the convent, was genuinely vexed.

'Oh, Mother, I expressly told Merat to make the

sleeves quite plain, but I can take the cuffs off in an instant.'

'They are not usual, but there is no necessity for taking them off.'

'Oh, yes, but I must take them off,' and in a moment she had found a pair of scissors, and cut through the stitches. 'It is entirely my maid's fault. How could she have been so stupid?'

The very newness of her plain linen collars made them seem out of place, but Mother Hilda did not seem to think there was anything amiss, and left Evelyn to change her dress, promising to return for her in a few minutes.

She changed her dress almost gaily, thinking that she had not come to the convent for ever, only till her father wanted her—that would be in three months, maybe six, and in that time she hoped her mission would be accomplished. And it was a very demure Evelyn, in her straight black gown, and her dark gold hair neatly brushed back off her face, who was waiting for Mother Hilda when she returned, bringing with her a white cap and black veil, and a prim little black cashmere cape.

'Will you come with me to dear Mother's room?' said the Novice Mistress; 'she always gives the postulants the cap and veil herself. It is the outward sign that they are admitted as aspirants to the religious life.'

The Prioress's room was on the ground floor, and its long French windows opened on to the terrace walk. Once no doubt it had been a boudoir; and catching sight of the curiously carved scrolls on the tall wooden mantelpiece, Evelyn thought of the women who had sat there dreaming of their lovers, and waiting for them. Now it was the workroom of a busy woman. The crowded writing-table, on which stood a beautiful crucifix in yellow ivory, occupied the space by the window, and papers and tin boxes were piled in one corner. There was no carpet, and the one armchair was worn and shabby. There were flowers in vases and bowls, and in a large cage canaries uttered their piercing songs.

'I like your room, Reverend Mother; will you let me come and see you here sometimes now I am a nun?'

'This is where I do all my scolding; perhaps you won't like it when you are sent for,' said the Prioress, but she smiled at Evelyn when she said it, and the words lost their severity. 'Now we must hide all this fair hair under a little cap.'

Evelyn knelt in front of the Prioress, so that the little old nun could put the white cap on her head, and pin the black veil over it. When she had done this, she drew Evelyn to her and kissed her.

'Now you look like my own child, with all your worldly vanities hidden away. I believe Monsignor Mostyn would hardly know his penitent in her new dress. And now,' she went on, 'let us go to the chapel together and thank our dear Lord that He has brought you to His feet. Give me your arm, my dear child, I am not very strong to-day.'

She laid a faint hand on Evelyn's arm, and they walked slowly down the corridor to the door leading to the nuns' choir, and Evelyn was conscious of a sudden new growth of affection for this frail old woman whose spirit stood undaunted amid much adversity. She followed the nun into the choir of the church, and found herself for the first time on the inner side of the high iron grille. The Prioress knelt in her stall, and Evelyn remained kneeling on the floor beside her, and those few moments of silent prayer seemed to unite the two women closely in the purpose which had brought them together.

Mother Hilda had explained to Evelyn that the community assembled for supper immediately after the Angelus. All the customs were unknown to her, and more nervous than she had ever felt before, she placed herself at the head of the procession next to a giggling novice. The refectory doors were thrown open, the Mother Prioress began the processional psalm in Latin, the Sisters repeated the alternate verses. Evelyn felt the novice nudge her, and they began to walk slowly towards the refectory, their eyes fixed on the ground. In the middle of the long room Evelyn and the novice stopped and bowed to the great crucifix which hung between the windows over the table of the Superior. Then they placed them-

selves in front of one of the tables at the lower end of the room; they were followed by the rest of the novices; the lay Sisters occupied a similar position opposite; the upper portions of the table were reserved for the choir Sisters, and the places of the three Superiors were in front of the table at the top of the room. The Mother Prioress then recited the larger portion of the grace. There were responses and versicles, and these were repeated by the Sisters. The opening sentence of the *paternoster* was spoken by the Prioress, and it was continued in silence by all, and at the Gloria all bowed their heads.

Then one of the Sisters slipped out of her place, and kneeling before the Prioress murmured a few Latin words, to which was given a Latin reply; she then went to a high reading desk in the corner by the Superior's table and read aloud a few verses from Holy Scripture. When the reader had finished the whole community responded *Deo gratias;* and all went to their places in silence, the novices passing this time in front of Evelyn. She found herself at the bottom of the long wooden bench, behind the polished oak table.

In each place there was an enamelled plate and a check blue and white napkin, and a large china mug. Two Sisters went round with cans in their hands, and filled every mug with hot, weak, sugary tea. A large platter piled high with slices of bread and butter was passed down the table, and above the clatter of the knives upon the tin plates the voice of the reader was heard; it was a monotonous chant, and the subject of the reading Evelyn gathered to be the life of some female saint, famous for her austerities.

It was a disappointment to her that she could only see what was trivial and prosaic, and a long line of silent meals stretched out before her through days and years, and she could not eat. Suddenly she was astonished by Sister Veronica's appearance by her side—slim and straight like a figure in an old Italian picture she stood by her, holding in her hand a plate on which there was a poached egg. None of the Sisters were eating poached eggs, and Evelyn nearly refused it, but Veronica smiled, saying under her breath,

'You must eat it,' and she put the plate down before Evelyn with a resolute little gesture.

Soon after a very plain cake was handed round, and the eating of this cake was perhaps the hardest part of the meal. She hesitated a moment, and then decided that the eating of this cake should be her first act of mortification, and she tried to avoid watching the novice beside her, who she noticed had eaten four slices of bread and butter, and was enjoying her cake. As the nuns finished, they folded their hands and sat with eyes cast down. The monotonous voice of the reader droned on, until suddenly, with a little wooden hammer, the Prioress struck the table, giving the signal to rise. The long grace was repeated, with the necessary variations, and the procession passed slowly out in the same order as it had entered.

In the passage the novice at Evelyn's elbow whispered to her to go up the novitiate stairs. The voice of the professed nuns died away as they turned towards their own community room; and it was a little party of five that walked ahead of Mother Hilda into the room at the end of the novitiate passage.

XIII

They knelt before the large crucifix which occupied the centre of one of the walls.

Mother Hilda recited the Litany of our Lady, and when it was done, and they had risen to their feet, she said,—

'Now, Evelyn, you must be introduced to your sisters —Sister Barbara I think you have met, as she sings in the choir. This is Sister Angela; this tall maypole is Sister Winifred, and this little being here is Sister Jerome, who was the youngest till you came. Are you not pleased, Jerome, to have one younger than yourself?' The novices said how do you do, and looked shy and awkward for a minute, but their interest in Evelyn was forgotten for the

moment in their anxiety to know whether recreation was to be spent indoors or out.

'Mother, we may go out, mayn't we? Oh, thank you so much, it is such a lovely evening. We need not wear cloaks, need we? Oh, that is all right, just our garden shoes;' and there was a general scurry to the cells for shoes, whilst Evelyn and Mother Hilda made their way downstairs and by another door into the still summer evening.

'How lovely it is,' Evelyn exclaimed, and she felt that if she and Mother Hilda could have spent the recreation hour together, her first convent evening might have been in a way happy. But the chattering novices had caught them up, and when they were sitting all a-row on a bench or grouped on a variety of little wooden stools, they asked her questions as to her sensations in the refectory, and Evelyn felt a little jarred by their familiarity.

'Were you not frightened when you felt yourself at the head of the procession? I was,' said Winifred.

'But you didn't get through nearly so well as Sister Evelyn; you turned the wrong way at the end of the passage, and Mother had to go after you,' said Sister Angela; 'we thought you were going to run away,' and they went into the details as to how they had felt on their arrival, and various little incidents were recalled, illustrating the experience of previous postulants, and these were productive of much hilarity.

'What did you all think of the cake?' said Sister Barbara, suddenly.

'Was it Angela's cake?' asked Mother Hilda. 'Angela, I really must congratulate you, you will be quite a distinguished *chef* in time.'

Sister Angela blushed with delight, saying, 'Yes, I made it yesterday, Mother; but of course Sister Rufina stood over me to see that I didn't forget anything.'

'Ah, well, I don't think I cared very much for the flavouring,' said Sister Barbara in pondering tones.

'You seemed to me to be enjoying it very much at the time,' said Sister Evelyn, joining the conversation for the first time, and when she added that Sister Barbara had eaten

four slices of bread and butter, the laugh turned against Barbara, and everyone was hilarious. It was evident that Sister Barbara's appetite was considered an excellent joke in the novitiate.

Evelyn marvelled that grown-up women should be so easily amused; and yet was their conversation more silly than that of a London drawing-room? It was only that it was a different kind of silliness, to which she had not yet grown accustomed; and with a sinking heart Evelyn tried her best to keep up a polite interest in the recreation. The novices were all dressed alike, but Evelyn had quickly decided that besides Sister Veronica only Sister Winifred was a choir Sister; the others were clearly lay Sisters. Sister Barbara and Sister Angela were very young—not more than one or two-and-twenty; Sister Jerome looked over thirty and had a plain, sad face. They worked while they talked, and Evelyn had to confess that she hated needlework, and had never learnt to knit. They told her that she had better begin at once or she would have no stockings. It was Sister Barbara who was told to teach her, but as neither needles nor wool was available at the moment, the lesson was postponed till next recreation.

Presently Sister Veronica came running down the garden path and joined the little group; she had waited at supper and had had to have her meal afterwards.

'I came as quickly as I could,' she said, 'for I didn't wish to miss all of Sister Evelyn's first recreation,' and she looked at Evelyn with such a tender little smile of welcome that Evelyn was cheered, and when Mother Hilda said Veronica might sit next her, and pulled up a little wooden stool for her, she felt almost absurdly grateful.

The little babble and talk meandered on, checked and guided by Mother Hilda, who saved it from falling into absolute silliness. And presently, by a clever turn given by her to the conversation, they were all talking of Italy, and Evelyn found that Mother Hilda knew Rome and Milan quite well, and she herself was encouraged to talk of her travels, whilst the novices listened open-eyed. Suddenly the bell rang out its warning notes and the recreation hour had come to an end. Mother Hilda stood up and began

the *De Profundis*, the Sisters repeating the alternate verses. The beauty of the prayer, of this appeal for the peace of departed souls sounded strangely beautiful in the still evening air; its beauty entered Evelyn's heart, and in a thrill of anticipation she seemed to foresee that this cloister life would mean a great deal to her one day. She seemed to divine the spiritual fulness which lies beneath the childish triviality which had tried her all the evening; and, kneeling among the community in church she began to understand the importance a church is to a community; how much it means to each individual member, and how, on entering her church, each enters the mysterious and profound life of prayer. She felt she was no longer a solitary soul fighting a lonely battle; now she was a member of a spiritual community, and her wandering thoughts would be drawn into the streams of petitions going up to God. A nun whispered that she need not stay for the night office, and she refrained from saying that it was now eight, and that for many years she had not been to bed till past midnight. This was her first act of obedience.

'This mattress,' she said to herself as she turned restlessly, 'is very trying, but it is a means to an end,' and she foresaw a wider life than she could have known in the world.

XIV

THERE are hours of the day which are unknown to those who live in the world, and six o'clock in the morning was an hour unknown to Evelyn. It was at that hour she awaked from a shallow, restless sleep, and heard with a drowsy brain that she would be expected in chapel in half an hour. She rolled herself out of bed, and still only half conscious, she hurried through her simple dressing. Her small basin and water-jug seemed to her miserably insufficient, but her desire not to be late for chapel saved her from further reflection regarding excessive cleanliness.

The convent day began with half an hour for medita-

tion, and this was just over when Evelyn entered the chapel. At half-past six there were morning prayers, followed by Prime and Tierce; at seven Mass and Exposition, and at a quarter to eight breakfast; and a breakfast of weak tea and bread and butter made Evelyn feel that before the end of the week she would be back in her Bayswater flat. But taking her purpose between her teeth, she determined not to yield so easily. She followed Mother Hilda and the novices to the novitiate, and tied on the blue apron that was given to her. Every novice was expected to make her own bed, and to tidy and sweep out her cell before she did any other work. They divided between them such work as dusting the novitiate and sweeping the stairs and passage, and keeping the Mother Mistress's cell in cleanliness and order.

Evelyn had done plenty of housework in her younger days, but she seemed to have forgotten how to use a broom, and the making of her bed had exhausted her, and she felt more inclined to get into it than to follow the Mother Mistress down to Sext and None at nine o'clock. She managed, however, to overcome her weakness, and she and Sister Winifred and Sister Veronica preceded Mother Hilda in the cloister, where they joined the rest of the community. After Sext and None a pause came, and none too soon did it come for Evelyn, who felt she was giving way; and perceiving her condition the Mother Mistress asked her to come to the novitiate. Evelyn felt that to sit in a cheerful sunny room, with windows looking on to the garden, hearing the voice of the quiet nun speaking to her, was the pleasantest hour she could hope for.

'The centre of our life,' said Mother Hilda, 'is the perpetual adoration of the blessed Sacrament exposed on the altar. Our life is a life of expiation; we expiate by our prayers and our penances and our acts of adoration the many insults which are daily flung at our divine Lord by those who not only disobey His commandments but deny His very presence on our altars. To our prayers of expiation we add prayers of intercession; we pray for the many people in this country outside the faith who offend our Lord Jesus Christ more from ignorance than from malice.

All our little acts of mortification are offered with this intention. From morning Mass until Benediction, our chapel, as you know, is never left empty for a single instant of the day; two silent watchers kneel before the blessed Sacrament, offering themselves in expiation of the sins of others. This watch before the blessed Sacrament is the chief duty laid upon the members of our community. Nothing is ever allowed to interfere with it. Unfailing punctuality is asked from everyone in being in the chapel at the moment her watch begins, and no excuse is accepted from those who fail in this respect. Our idea is that all through the day a ceaseless stream of supplication should mount to heaven, that not for a single instant should there be a break in the work of prayer. Our Sisters are taught to feel that, next to receiving Holy Communion, this hour of prayer and meditation in the presence of our Lord is the central factor in their spiritual life, the axis on which their spiritual progress revolves. If our numbers permitted it, we should have perpetual adoration by day and night, as in the mother house in France; but here the bishop only allows us to have Exposition once a month throughout the night, and all our Sisters look forward to this as their greatest privilege.'

'It is a very beautiful life, Mother Hilda; but it is hard to bear.'

'Only at first; you will bear it more and more easily as you realise its beauty. Once a week, in the novitiate, I give instructions to the novices on our rule and its object, and perhaps this will prove a help to you.'

'And when shall I take my watch?'

'I don't think dear Mother has fixed your hour yet. She did not wish you to begin to-day; we must not overburden you with piety in the beginning. In any case, the novices are not allowed more than half an hour's watch in the day—only the professed choir Sisters take an hour.'

Obedience, the Mother Mistress declared, was the beginning of the religious life, and Evelyn must bear in mind she was as a child in school, with nothing to teach and everything to learn.

'The experience of your past life,' said Mother Hilda, with a smile, 'which you may think entitles you to con-

sideration, will probably only be a hindrance to you in the new life that you are beginning. I would beg you to put all the teaching of the world as far from your mind as possible, it will only confuse you. What we think wise, the world thinks foolish, and the wisdom of the world is to us a vanity.'

After the rule of obedience came the rule of silence, and that, too, had to be followed in what seemed to her a painfully literal sense. Silence from the saying of the *De Profundis*, after evening recreation, until after Mass the next morning!

'Conversation is never allowed except at recreation, and all whispering in the passages and visits to each other's cells are forbidden. The novices,' Mother Hilda added, 'are not allowed to speak to any of the professed without special permission; but in your case the Mother Prioress has decided that an exception will be made in favour of Sister Mary John, as you and she will of course have music to discuss; but you must keep the rules strictly as regards everyone else.'

'Mayn't I even speak to Mother Philippa?'

'Not unless Mother Philippa first speaks to you.'

Evelyn had not expected this complete interruption of all human intercourse, not only from the outside world, but even from those who were actually within the walls of the convent.

Perhaps Mother Hilda saw what was passing in her mind, and feeling that her new postulant had received as much instruction as she could absorb in one day, she looked at her watch, remarking that she expected Sister Winifred and Sister Veronica for their Latin lesson; and a few minutes after the two novices appeared, each with her breviary in her hand.

The Latin lesson consisted mainly of explanation of the offices for the day, and reading aloud for practice and pronunciation, and the translation of one or two of the psalms. Evelyn applied herself to the lesson which Mother Hilda made interesting by her enthusiasm for the subject and her intimate knowledge of all that the breviary contains; and the books were only closed when the Angelus rang at twelve o'clock.

XV

THEN Evelyn remembered that she had not had a word with the Mother Prioress, nor had she had a word with Sister Mary John, though this was necessary and could not be delayed much longer if she were going to sing at Benediction. She had looked forward to speaking to this nun in the recreation hour; but Mother Hilda, having regard for their health, had kept them walking up and down St Peter's Path. The sun was hot, and the conversation seemed more trivial and disjointed than it had done the night before; and in her weariness Evelyn had asked herself if she could endure this life to the end of a week.

Rosary followed recreation, and Vespers followed Rosary, and Evelyn had just gone up the novitiate stairs, feeling that her patience and her piety were equally exhausted, and wondering what would be the next duty required of her, when Sister Veronica appeared, and with her sweet, demure smile, she said, 'Reverend Mother would like to speak to you in her room.'

'Oh, thank you so much; I had just begun to think I was never to see Mother Prioress again.'

'I expect you are tired, aren't you? The life is hard at first.'

'Yes, I am dreadfully tired,' Evelyn said, conscious of a sudden inclination to tears.

'I am sorry, but you know we shall all help you, and you will feel better when you have had a little talk with dear Mother. But you must come at once,' the little novice added in sudden alarm, for Evelyn had shown no sign of immediate obedience. 'You must never keep Reverend Mother waiting; and please take off your apron; we never go into her room with our aprons on.'

Evelyn untied her apron, and flinging it on a chair, hastened from the room. Veronica picked up the discarded garment with a smile, and folding it neatly in four, rolled it up and twisted the strings carefully round it, and laid it on Evelyn's bed in her cell.

At the same moment Evelyn was impetuously knock-

ing at the Prioress's door, with all the effusiveness of the actress, and none of the demureness of the novice. Sitting with the Prioress was Sister Mary John, her strong, expectant face full of pleasure at the sight of Evelyn.

'Dear Mother, it is nice of you to have sent for me; I was pining to see you.'

'Oh, but postulants must learn patience, you know; and how are you getting on, my dear child? Have Mother Mistress's instructions filled you with misgivings?'

'I do feel rather bewildered, Mother, and I am beginning to realise that no one outside the convent has the slightest idea of what it is like inside.'

'Well, perhaps you will feel more at home talking music with Sister Mary John for a bit.'

Evelyn saw that Sister Mary John was longing to interrupt the Reverend Mother, but she managed to restrain herself.

'Well,' the Prioress continued in her clear, even tones, 'it is she and you who must be responsible for the convent music in future, and you must talk over what is best for you to sing. You will both see, I am sure, that in the little musical reformation you are going to undertake, you should be guided in your choice of music by what will best serve the interests of the community. Now, as regards the reformation and the singing of the plain chant, the Benedictine gradual *versus* the Ratisbon, do you really think that our little lay congregation would take an interest in the question? Is the difference between the two sufficient for the uncultivated to distinguish? That must be a question for the future; the immediate question is, how can we render our daily Benediction service more popular? You have brought some music with you, Evelyn, I believe?'

'I have brought a good deal, Mother; whatever seemed most likely to be of use.'

'Well, you and Sister Mary John had better take it into the library and look through it together, and decide what to begin with. You can use the harmonium there.'

'The library harmonium is out of tune, Mother,' broke in Sister Mary John.

'If it is out of tune, we will send for the tuner to-morrow, and you will be glad to hear that I am going to arrange for more time to be given to choir practice, but it will require some consideration.'

'Well, that is a comfort at anyrate,' said Sister Mary John, as they left the Prioress's room; 'your coming amongst us has accomplished something already. For years I have been telling the Reverend Mother that two hours a week are insufficient for practising, but I could never make her see the necessity for more.'

'But we must practise every day if we are to accomplish anything,' said Evelyn.

'I have not yet told you,' said Sister Mary John, 'how glad I am that you have come. You don't know how I have prayed for you,' and the brown eyes gazed at Evelyn with their radiant smile. 'I do hope you will stay; you must try your hardest.'

'I don't know, I am sure; at recreation to-day I began to think I could not stand it much longer.'

'Why, Sister Evelyn, you have only been here half a day. You do not yet know what our life is. You must not judge by the mere outside like that; is it the food, or what? Of course, I know the food is a trial to everyone at first.'

'No, it is not so much the food,' said Evelyn, as the two friends laid their bundles of music on the library table, 'that is trying, but one can outlive the food. No, it is the sense of having all one's day parcelled out for one in a round of trivial little duties; not a minute to call one's own, not a moment left to oneself, and I, who have been my own mistress for years, I feel as though I should choke, or scream and do something desperate.'

'Yes, I understand,' said Sister Mary John, kindly, 'I know the feeling.'

'I knew you were the one person here who would understand. I wonder if I shall be able to bear it—oh, those recreations, I don't think I can get used to them.'

'I know, I know,' repeated Sister Mary John, and her clear comprehension soothed Evelyn's spirit. 'I know our life seems trivial from an outside point of view. But is the conversation of the novices sillier than that

of the ordinary Society woman? You are troubled because you do not yet see the spiritual life that lies so close beneath the trifling surface—all our real love of our Lord, all our eager desire to serve Him, all our anxious endeavour not to be wholly unworthy of our vocation.'

As Sister Mary John talked, her face lit up and her eyes shone, with a clear, passionate joy, and Evelyn saw that her submission was no half-hearted one, that she had embraced the life with her heart and her intellect, and if the yoke fretted here and there, it was borne with the splendid courage of a strong nature. In her there was nothing petty or narrow, her warm sympathies had never been chilled by separation from the world, and though Sister Evelyn recognised that Sister Mary John might have many human faults—impatience and rash judgment and self-will, from which Mother Hilda's well-balanced and deeply religious nature was free—yet it seemed to her that she would receive more help from the impulsive enthusiasm of the one than the delicate spirituality of the other.

'The first thing,' the nun said, 'is to grasp the great ideal that permeates our life; I am sure Mother Mistress has spoken to you of it already.'

Evelyn nodded.

'We must keep it always in the front of our thoughts; to us it must be the only real thought that life has to offer. The externalities of our life are of no account. What can they matter in the light of eternity? The petty routine which distresses you is only the envelope, which will fade from your eyes, you may be sure, and you will soon enter into the enjoyment of the spiritual life, without which life lived here would be unendurable, with it the convent is an earthly paradise.'

'Yes, but how may I arrive at this enviable state of detachment?'

'By prayer,' said Sister Mary John, and Evelyn noticed how her face became suddenly absorbed. 'We must learn to pray. We come here because we can pray better here than in the world. We can do nothing without prayer; but by prayer we can do almost everything. Once we enter the life of prayer this miserable world falls behind us, and we

enter the real world. Let us kneel down at once and pray, before we do anything else.'

They fell on their knees before the almost life-size crucifix which hung between the windows, and they rose from their knees with shining eyes which smiled at one another.

'There, you look better already,' said Sister Mary John. 'Now, what about the music?'

When they had looked through all the music, making separate heaps of pieces that seemed within the compass of their little choir, Sister Mary John said, 'What will you sing to-day at Benediction? Will you sing Stradella's Chanson d'Eglise or will you sing Schubert's Ave Maria —nothing is more beautiful than that.'

'I will sing the Ave Maria.' . . . The nun sat down to play it, but she had not played many bars when Evelyn interrupted her. 'The intention of the single note, dear Sister, the octave you are striking now, has always seemed to me like a distant bell heard in the evening. Will you play it so?'

XVI

And the idea of a bell sounding across the evening landscape was in the mind of the congregation when Sister Mary John played the octave; and the broken chords she played with her right hand awoke a sensation of lights dying behind distant hills.

It is almost night, and amid a lonely landscape a harsh rock appears, and by it a forlorn woman stands—a woman who is without friend or any mortal hope—and she commends herself to the care of the Virgin. She begins to sing softly, tremulous like one in pain and doubt, 'Ave Maria, hearken to the Virgin's cry.' The melody she sings is rich, even ornate, but the richness of the phrase with its two little grace notes does not mitigate the sorrow at the core; the rich garb in which the idea is clothed does not rob the song of its humanity.

Evelyn's voice filled with the beauty of the melody,

and she sang the phrase which closes the stanza, a phrase which dances like a puff of wind in an evening bough, so tenderly, so lovingly, that acute tears trembled under the eyelids. And all her soul was in her voice when she sang the phrase of passionate faith which the lonely, disheartened woman sings, looking up from the desert rock. Then her voice sank into the calm beauty of the Ave Maria, now given with confidence in the Virgin's intercession, and the broken chords passed down the keyboard, uniting with the last note of the solemn octaves, which had sounded through the song like bells heard across an evening landscape.

'How beautifully she sings it,' a man said out loud, and his neighbour looked and wondered, for the man's eyes were full of tears.

'You have a beautiful voice, child,' said the old nun, when they came out of church, 'and it is a real pleasure to me to hear you sing, and to know that for the future your great gift will be devoted to the service of God. Shall we go into the garden for a little walk before supper? We shall have it to ourselves, and the air will do you good.'

It was the month of June, and the convent garden was in all the colour of its summer—crimson and pink; and all the scents of the month, stocks and sweetbriar, were blown up from St Peter's Walk. In the long mixed borders the blue larkspurs stood erect between Canterbury bells, and the bushy peonies, crimson and pink, and, over all, the great vagrant poppies showered their gay petals. Roses, like pale porcelain, clustered along the low terraced walk and up the house itself, over the stucco walls; but more beautiful than the roses, were the delicate petals of the clematis stretched out like fingers upon the walls.

An old nun was being wheeled up and down the terrace in a chair by one of the lay Sisters, that she might enjoy the sweet air.

'I must introduce you to Sister Lawrence,' the Prioress said, 'she will never forgive me if I don't. She is the eldest member of our community; if she lives another two years she will complete half a century of convent life.'

As they drew near Evelyn saw two black eyes in a white, almost fleshless face. The eyes alone seemed to live, and the shrunken figure, huddled in many shawls, gave an impression of patriarchal age. Evelyn saw by her veil that Sister Lawrence was a lay Sister, and the old nun tried to draw herself up in her chair as they approached, and kissed the hand of the Prioress.

'Well, Sister, how are you feeling? I have brought you our new musical postulant to look at. I want to know what you think of her. You must know, Evelyn,' said the Prioress, 'that Sister Lawrence is a great judge of people's vocations; I always consult her about my new postulants.'

Sister Lawrence took Evelyn hands between hers, and gazed into her face so earnestly that Evelyn feared her innermost thoughts were being read. Then with a little touch of wilfulness, that came oddly from one so old and venerable, the Sister said,—

'Well, Reverend Mother, she is pretty, anyhow, and it is a long time since we had a pretty postulant.'

'Really, Lawrence, I am ashamed of you,' said the Prioress with playful severity; 'Sister Evelyn will be quite disedified.'

'Mother, if I like them to be pretty it is only because they have one more gift to bring to the feet of our dear Lord. I see in Sister Evelyn's face that she has a vocation. I believe she is the providence that God has sent to help us through our difficulties.'

'We're all praying,' said the Prioress, 'that it may be so.'

XVII

'Sister Cecilia, who is our sacristan, is a little slow and forgetful,' the Prioress said one day. 'She wants a little help, and you are just the one, Evelyn, to help her, and you will soon learn the work.'

The sacristry was a large, cool room, wainscoted in oak, and Evelyn followed the Prioress into a sweet

fragrance of lavender and orris root. She was shown how the vestments were laid on the shelves, with tissue paper between them, and how they were covered with holland wrappers. These vestments were the pride of the convent. They dated from its prosperous times; and Evelyn thought, as she was shown the white satin vestments for the priest, deacon and sub-deacon, used on Easter Sundays, the professed days of the Sisters and the visits of the Bishop, and the white embroidered vestments with the figure of Our Lady in a blue medallion in the centre of the cross, used for all feasts of the Virgin, how the altar raiment had always been the pious labour and vanity of women who inured their bodies to the discomfort of coarse habits and lived in bare cells; how women's natural desire for embroidered silks and richly-assorted colours had found expression in the adornment of the altar and the garmenting of a priest.

There were two sets of red vestments, one made of red and green brocade, and the colour of its lining, Evelyn said, reminded her of beetroot, and she got into the habit of calling them the 'beetroot ones,' and it amused her to avoid putting them for wear whenever she could. On another shelf were the great copes in satin and brocade, gold and white, with embroidered hoods, and orphreys with veils to match. The processional banners were stored in tall presses, and with them, hanging on wire hooks, were the altar curtains, thick with gold thread.

The pride of the convent in its vestments and banners never ceased; how much had been paid for them, and how much they were now worth, was a constant subject of conversation. Once a whisper had gone round that the white satin vestments might have to be sold, and the nuns had said they would rather live on bread and water always than part with them. This was a little while before Evelyn had come to their help, and she had been told that it was she who had saved the vestments; so when they were in use she raised herself in her place so that she might see them better, and she kept a special watchfulness over them for moth and dust.

In the sacristy they were always busy and always behindhand with their work. For the high altar there were

the curtains and embroidered frontals and the tabernacle hangings, and as these had to harmonise with the vestments it often happened they were changed every day; and on the day before Mass for the Dead the whole altar had to be stripped after Benediction and black hangings had to be put on, and these had to be changed the next morning after Mass was over. Then the management of the candles demanded much attention. They had to be all of equal length when the altar was lighted for Benediction; and to be economical, with as splendid a show as possible, was the ambition of the sacristan. It was essential to make sure that no candle should ever burn into its socket, leaving less than the twelve ordained by the Church for Exposition.

The work of the sacristy seemed to Evelyn to be arranged with a view to giving the greatest amount of trouble to the sacristan. It was the Prioress's whim never to use the ordinary altar cloth with an embroidered hem, but always cloths on which lace frontals were lightly tacked, and the sewing on of the lace without creasing the beautiful white linen required great care and dexterity, and the spilling of a little wax at once condemned an altar cloth to the wash. Then, every member of the community seemed to have an interest in the business of the sacristy. Apart from the canonical directions for divine service, there existed an unwritten code of customs of pious observances. Some saints were honoured by having their banners exhibited in the sanctuary throughout the octave or the feast, whilst others were allowed little temporary altars on which some relic could be exposed. The Sisters themselves were often mistaken as to what had been done on previous anniversaries, but the Prioress's memory was unfailing, and in cases of doubt every point had to be referred to her. One of the strictest rules of the house was that the sacristan took orders from none but the Prioress; and Evelyn rejoiced that this was so, for it gave her frequent excuse for little hasty visits and chats in the Prioress's room.

To arrange the high altar for a great feast Evelyn would sometimes rob one of the other altars, especially if it were dedi-

cated to a saint who did not appeal to her ; and the Prioress, coming one day to see what progress was being made, found St Joseph's altar stripped save for a single pair of candlesticks and two flower vases filled with artificial flowers. Evelyn was admonished, and she dared to answer that she was not interested in Saint Joseph—'though, of course, he was a very worthy man.'

'My dear Evelyn, I cannot allow you to speak in this way of Saint Joseph, who is one of the patrons of the convent, nor can I allow his altar to be robbed in this fashion.'

On another occasion the Prioress held to her opinion regarding the vestments to be used, but Evelyn answered, 'Yes, Mother, I know. I always use the common ones for the martyrs ; but the apostles—well—are the apostles, and you would not like them to be put off with the beetroot things.' Behind them stood Sister Cecilia, listening with growing astonishment that a mere postulant should dare to speak to the Prioress on terms of equality ! She took no pride in her position as sacristan, seeming to see in her duties only a great deal of work and a responsibility from which she would like to be free. Evelyn could see that Sister Cecilia looked upon her enthusiasms as amateurish, and that she was convinced they would soon wear off. Meanwhile, the nun was glad to relinquish her work and retire to the chapel to indulge in pious reverie. She was the type of nun who is the despair of every Reverend Mother—the idle devout—her common complaint being that she had no time to say her prayers. The Prioress thought that the community prayers according to the rule of the convent were sufficient, and one day she compelled her to return to the sacristy, and had then compared Sister Cecilia's work with Evelyn's. If she did not, the Prioress said, put more fervour into her prayers than she put into her work, they would avail her little enough.

Evelyn had brought her experience of stage decoration and her own talent for personal decoration for the parts she had played into the decoration of the chapel, and poor Sister Cecilia wondered at the marvels which Evelyn accomplished

with the scantiest materials. But fired by the Prioress's remarks she henceforth refused to Evelyn any share in the work of the altar, and on the feast of the Assumption she laboured until she could no more, anxious to accomplish a decoration which would win words of approval from the Reverend Mother. But when she stopped to view her work at the end of the day the conviction that it was worthless forced her to ask Evelyn to put it right.

Evelyn tried to rearrange the altar as quietly and as unobtrusively as she could, pretending that her alterations were few and slight, and keeping herself from looking towards the nun who prayed for strength to conquer her sinful jealousy. Sister Cecilia had told Evelyn she was not to tend the sacred lamp any longer; but forgot this piece of spitefulness in her contrition, and left the chapel without filling the lamp; and that night, for luck was always against her, the Prioress came down to say her prayers when the community was in bed. She found the chapel in darkness, and had to return to her room for matches. Now it was a point of pious observance that the Easter light, struck on Holy Saturday, should be preserved through the year, each new wick being lighted from the dying one. Sister Cecilia's carelessness had broken the continuity; she was severely reprimanded and dismissed from the sacristy. She ate her meals that day kneeling on the refectory floor, and for many a day the shameful occurrence was remembered.

Veronica was appointed in her place, and delighted at her promotion, she wore a quaint little air of importance, and hurried about with a bunch of keys hanging from her belt by a long chain.

It amused Evelyn to find herself under Veronica's orders, but the little novice was quite composed; she merely said, 'I cannot help it, Sister Evelyn; of course you ought to be in my place, and I cannot think why dear Mother has arranged it like this.'

They might talk in the sacristy, and Evelyn began to see into Veronica's nature; and her innocent nature revealed itself in little questions.

'Why do you want to be a nun, Sister Evelyn?' she said as they folded up the vestments after Mass.

'Is it strange that I should wish to be a nun?'

'Yes, for you are not like any of us, nor has the convent been the same since you came.'

'Are you sorry I want to be a nun?'

'Sorry, Sister Evelyn? No, indeed. God chose you from the beginning as the means He would employ to save us, only I cannot see you as a nun, always satisfied with the life here.'

'Everyone does not know from childhood what they are going to do. You always knew your vocation, Veronica.'

'I can't imagine myself anything but a nun, and yet I'm not always satisfied. Sometimes I'm filled with longing, a great longing, and I feel as though I could not live without it; yet I don't know what I want. It is an extraordinary feeling. Do you know what I mean, Sister Evelyn?'

'Yes, dear, I think I do.'

'It makes me feel quite faint, and it seizes me so suddenly; I've wanted to tell you for a long time, only I haven't liked to. There are days when it makes me so restless that I cannot say my prayers, and so I know the feeling must be wrong.'

The nun's words stirred an old scruple in Evelyn, and she did not dare to answer, but Sister Veronica continued as if talking to herself,—

'It is something in the quality of your voice. It thrills through me, and brings on this feeling worse than anything. But as no one else seems affected by your singing as I am, I fancied that it was because you felt the same.'

'I would not worry over it, Veronica. You'll get over it. It will pass.'

'I hope it will,' Veronica said. Her eyes were full of reverie, and behind her the open press exhaled a thin fragrance of lavender.

XVIII

FATHER AMBROSE was a Carmelite monk, a great preacher and a man of the highest sanctity, who was a very old friend of the house, and the spiritual adviser of the Prioress and many of her nuns. He came once or twice a year, and his visits were among the great events of conventual history. He was coming to them that week; he would stay with Father Daly some days, and this visit was the subject of conversation during the morning's recreation.

It was pleasant to sit talking of him under their great tree. The air and the earth were warm, and Mother Hilda sat in the midst of her novices and postulants, helping the conversation, guiding it occasionally. Everyone was anxious to talk, but everyone was anxious to think, too, for everyone knew that she would be questioned by the aged monk, and that the chances of her being accepted as a nun depended in no small measure on his opinion of her vocation. But in the midst of their personal interests in the monk, Evelyn noticed that the eyes of the novices were frequently turned to Veronica, and that they were all laughing at her.

'Have you noticed, Sister Evelyn, how beaming Sister Veronica has looked for the last day or two? I can't think what has come to her.'

'Yes, isn't it lucky for her to have been put in the sacristy just before Father Ambrose's visit; now she will be able to put out his vestments herself.'

'Yes, and you may be sure we shall have all the best vestments every day; and she will be able to have any number of private interviews behind our backs.'

'Now, children, that will do,' interrupted Mother Hilda, as she noticed Veronica's crimson cheeks as she bent over her work.

Evelyn wondered, and that evening in the sacristy Veronica broke into expostulations with an excitement that took Evelyn by surprise.

'How could I not care for Father Ambrose? I have known him all my life. Once I was very ill with pleurisy,

I nearly died, and Father Ambrose anointed me and gave me the last sacrament. I had not made my first communion then, I was only eleven, but they gave me the sacrament, for they thought I was dying, and I thought so too, and I promised our Lord I would be a nun if I got well. I never told anyone except Father Ambrose, and he has helped me all through to keep my vow—so you see, he has been everything to me. I have never loved anyone as I have loved Father Ambrose. When he comes here I always ask him for some rule or directions, so that I may have the happiness of obeying him till his next visit, and it is so trying, is it not, Sister Evelyn, when the novices make their silly little jokes about it, and of course they do not understand, they can't; but to me Father Ambrose means everything I care for, besides, he really is a saint. I believe he would have been canonised if he had lived in the Middle Ages. He has promised to profess me. It is wrong, I know, but really, I should hardly care to be professed if Father Ambrose could not be by.'

'So this,' Evelyn thought, 'is the passion of this child's life, this spiritual love of an aged monk, a love which is part and parcel of her highest and holiest thoughts. It is the most real thing in a life wholly purged of external events.'

And to Evelyn, always curiously interested in the mystery of sex, this spiritual love within the convent was strangely pathetic. Evelyn noted the change that had come over the little sacristan; her eyes shone, and her pale oval face had a pretty fresh colour, and she seemed to dance through her work.

Evelyn watched her sympathetically, understanding instinctively that Veronica was jealous that any other hands than hers should lay out the vestments he was to wear, and she turned her head so that Sister Veronica should not think she was being watched; and the little nun was happy in the corner of the sacristy laying out the gold vestments he was to wear, putting the gold chalice for him to use, and the gold cruets, which Evelyn had never seen used before, and she left out the finest towels for him to dry his hands. Being a monk he had a larger amice than the ordinary priest, and Veronica produced a coloured strip of embroidery, which

she tacked on to the outer hem of the amice so as to give it the desired appearance when the monk drew it over his head on entering or leaving the sacristy. Weeks after, Evelyn came upon this amice with the embroidery attached put away in a secret corner so that it should not be used in the ordinary way, and when on the second evening of his stay Father Ambrose preached familiarly to the nuns, choosing his text from the Song of Solomon, and dwelling upon the mystical union between Christ and His earthly spouse, Evelyn felt that of all the nuns it was probably Veronica who penetrated most fully into his meaning.

XIX

SUDDENLY she noticed in herself a little of that childish gaiety which had seemed to her to be one of the characteristics of the Sisters, and she reflected that she owed her peace of mind to her daily practice of obedience. She liked to break off in the middle of a sentence, at the first note of the Angelus or the *De Profundis*. She liked to hurry in answer to any summons of the Prioress or the Novice Mistress.

Obedience and chastity were the familiar spirits of the place, and like guardian angels they watched over her, and in the convent it seemed simple and natural to believe in God and all the dogmas of the Church.

In her first letter to her father she wrote :—

'I am so happy here that I wonder why I remained in the world so long. Behind love and behind fame there is the ache of living, and it only ceases in a convent. I often look round wondering how it was that I could have passed happiness by so often ; that I should have searched for it so eagerly, missing it always ; that I should have gone so far in quest of it, when all the time it was at hand. You will think that I am mistaken, that I am deceived by the novelty of a new life, that I am enchanted by a new

adventure. It may be so, though I do not think it is; but of this I am sure, that those who have been in the convent longest are the happiest of us all. I shall never forget how one day last autumn, when the grass was soaked with cold dew and the crisp leaves hung in a death-like silence, I met one of the lay Sisters, Sister Bridget, coming down the path. She was carrying a pail of water, and I noticed that she was going to our graveyard. She was going, she explained, to scrub the tiles which covered the late Reverend Mother's grave. "Ah, well, Mother's room must have its weekly turn out," she answered, and when I pointed out to her that the tiles were still clean, her answer made it clear that she regarded the task of attending to the grave not as a duty but as a privilege. Her face, withered and ruddy like an apple, reflected an extraordinary contentment, and I felt that if she were asked what she would do if she had to begin life again, she would answer: I would begin it again in a convent. She has worked for the community for nearly thirty years; she has been through all the early years of struggle—a struggle which has begun again—a struggle the details of which were not even told her, and which she had no curiosity to hear. She is content to work on to the end, believing that it was God's will for her to do so. The lay Sisters can aspire to none of the convent offices; they have none of the smaller distractions of receiving guests, and instructing converts and so forth, and not to have as much time for prayer as they desire is their penance. They are humble folk who strive in a humble way to separate themselves from the animal, and they see heaven from the wash-tub plainly. In the eyes of the world they are ignorant and simple hearts. They are ignorant, but of what are they ignorant? Only of the passing show, which every moment crumbles and perishes. I see them as I write—their ready smiles and their touching humility. They are humble workers in a humble vineyard, and they are content that it should be so.'

Speaking again of the happiness she had discovered in the convent, she said:—

'I sometimes look around a little dazed by my own happiness, and the happiness of those I see about me. I can hardly believe it is all true; life moves so easily from the early morning until bedtime. It flows (my comparison is a commonplace one, I know) like a beautiful stream, a steady current which bears onward happily and surely towards eternity. Everyone here has her work to do, everyone is busy and no one is overworked. If ever I felt disinclined for my work and wished for idleness I should find no one to idle with me. At every hour everyone is in her appointed place, doing her appointed duty. The food is not very good, nor very plentiful, for the nuns are poor. It is a little trying, I admit, to feel always a little hungry. But this inconvenience is slight, when we compare it with the great inconvenience which we have to bear with if we live in the world. Here, at all events, *ennui* is unknown. The remarks which we hear so often in the world, which I used to hear so often in Owen Asher's society, in the country houses where we used to visit—"What shall we do this evening? What shall we do to-morrow? Whom can we go and see?" are never heard here. Nor is there spitefulness nor jealousy, nor any divergence of aim; our ambition is the same, and it is the greatest and the noblest, for it is to love God, to please Him and to put sin away. It is such happiness to feel that we are all working for one common end. We know one another intimately here, although we talk very little, and were the hardships of convent life a great deal worse than they are, they would be worth bearing with because of that spiritual intimacy which we find only in the cloister.'

In another letter she said :—

'I am not yet happy as the other nuns are happy, because I am thinking of you. The ache of life is still in me, and I rarely wake in the morning without thinking of you. I see you in Rome, living in your lonely rooms, with no one to look after you, and then my life becomes bitter, for I think that the happiness which I find here has

not come to me by right, that I have snatched it. My duty is with you, and we can never be happy except when we are doing our duty. But you said you did not wish me to come to you in Rome; you left me to look after the sale of Dowlands and of my flat; you said you were going to live with the friars, and that I should be in your way until you had had time to find lodgings for me. Indeed it was by your wish that I came here. As you did not want me I came here to help those who did want me, and I am helping them. My singing brings crowds to Benediction every day. I am not in the least vain about my singing now. But I am praising myself. So I will tell you instead of the Prioress, who is certainly a wonderful woman. I see a great deal of her, and she seems to read me through and through, and to see things in me which I do not know myself, but which are, nevertheless, quite true. The other day, when I told her I had never been happy until I came here, and that it seemed to me I had found out my life at last, she said,—

'"My dear Evelyn, you have hardly any perception of what our life is, you know it only from the outside, you are still an actress, you are acting on a different stage, that is all."

'I could not answer her, for I felt I had adapted myself to the convent as I might to a new part; I do not say that the new part is not the part I shall play to the end, but now and again I catch myself playing a part. We are always playing parts in our life, no one is ever perfectly natural; we are all conscious of our actions —at least I am. An example will explain what I mean. The little penitential exercises, such as kissing the floor, as a sign of contrition for some petty fault, or kneeling for permission to pass to one's place in choir or refectory if one should chance to be late, are much more distasteful to the other nuns than to me. The other novices run from the furthest end of the convent at the first sound of the bell, to avoid the risk of what seems to them a humiliating ordeal. I look upon these things as the etiquette of the convent, just as it is the etiquette of the stage to allow a man to kiss you whom you do not care for in the least.

The Prioress did not suspect how true her remark was, and I did not tell her that in the first week I was deliberately late for dinner in order to test the sensation of kneeling before the entire community on the bare refectory floor.

'The other day when I was washing up dishes in the scullery, I laughed aloud. Of course there is nothing strange in it at all, but from the point of view of the world it is difficult to imagine a stranger transformation than the transformation of a *prima donna* into a scullery maid. But the world! Does it matter what it thinks? Shall I ever forget Owen Asher's persistent worldliness; he sacrificed everything to the enjoyment of the moment, and was the unhappiest man I ever knew. He was unhappy always, and the happiness which I could not give him and which he could not give me I see shining out of the eyes of the nuns, out of the eyes of these women who have renounced everything that is said to make life pleasant.

'The nuns have their trials, and they bear them as well as may be, for they are merely women, not angels, and are not possessed of any supernatural power of detachment from the ills of life. I have seen them struggle against weariness and failing health, and the novices sometimes astonish me by candid little grumbles, generally about the food. There is a good deal of irritability in the convent, but I am sure that the nuns do possess a divine something which outbalances the discomfort of their lives. They possess an extraordinary serenity of mind, and their optimism is delightful. As far as the rule allows them they are kind to one another, and I have seen none of that petty spite which is said to exist wherever a number of women gather together.'

In a letter to Monsignor she said :—

'Mother Philippa is our manager, all the house accounts are in her charge, and her watchful economy saved the convent from shipwreck these many years. Her talent for domestic economy found an excellent outlet in the administration of an impecunious convent. If she had stayed at

home, her abilities would have withered and she would have become as useless as her dull sisters ; not one of them is married, and it is not likely that Mother Philippa would have married if she had remained at home. She is the one success in the family—three dull sisters and a dull mother come to consult the nun as to what they shall do in every emergency. Unfortunately they do not always take her advice, and when they do not mistakes are the result. Mother Philippa's one trouble is her relations ; she dreads their visits. "Poor Fred," she said the other day, speaking of her family, "is only an expense." Was not that clever of her ? What an admirable summing up ! I can picture him coming back from Canada and quite cheerfully accepting the welcome of the doleful sisters. But this admirable woman is apparently not more pious than you or I.

'Forgive my irrepressible levity, dear Monsignor. The Reverend Mother often reproves me for it, but my levity has helped me through five months in a nunnery. Mother Philippa is one side of Saint Teresa, and she exists in every convent, but the other side of Saint Teresa I have not been able to discover in anyone. Mother Philippa is wholesome prose—the very best and plainest prose. The nearest thing to Saint Teresa here is certainly Sister Mary John. She does not fall to the ground and remain rigid, but the other day after Benediction she forgot to give the sign to go. It is the custom for the eldest Sister present to give the sign to leave the chapel. We waited for Sister Mary John, but no sign came. She remained kneeling, lost in her delight, no doubt seeing God in heaven quite clearly. The novices coughed and moved their feet, but Sister Mary John did not hear them. At last one of the novices nudged her, and she awoke as from a dream, and heard as in amazement that the half-hour was over. Half an hour ! what is half an hour to one who has been in eternity ? Centuries looked out of her eyes.

'She and the Reverend Mother represent to me what is most personal in the convent, and what is nearest to me. Veronica is set apart ; she is an abstraction, she is perfect innocence walking on earth, a white robe on which no speck of dust of the way has fallen, an angel by Fra

Angelico; but the Reverend Mother and Sister Mary John, like myself, have breathed the breath of the world; and those who have breathed the breath of the world are easily recognisable from those who have not. I have often thought this mixture of worldly alloy is necessary to give hardness and durability to the metal. If the whole of the community were composed of nuns like Veronica and Mother Hilda it could not continue, and I think the pecuniary difficulties of this convent are largely owing to the fact that the late Reverend Mother was without experience of the world. She, like Veronica and Mother Hilda, had passed from the schoolroom to the novitiate; but the present Prioress is a woman who has had experience of the life of the world, and I confess to a great curiosity to know what forced her to give up the world. I feel sure that some calamity fell upon her suddenly. I cannot otherwise explain this subtle intelligence, lithe and hard as steel, and eyes which divine at once a state of soul, and out of which some far-off sorrow shines. I can see the Prioress in the world, and the world crumbling away at her feet, and every path crumbling away except the path that led her to the convent. But I cannot see her in the intermediate stages.

'Regarding myself, what have I to tell you?—that I am beginning to fear I have not a vocation.'

In another letter to her father she said :—

'Oh, to be in Rome and to hear the wonderful choir you write to me about! To exchange the wailing and wobbling of half-a-dozen nuns trying to sing a piece of plain chant for a Mass by Palestrina. How I long for Rome now that spring should be here, a spare scant spring in England, a beautiful, gracious, Southern spring in Rome, the sweet Easter time chiming over scent-laden hills and plains. Here on the edge of the Common the winter is still bitter, loud winds are still blowing against our door. The Common is covered with snow, and the gorse is burnt up with frost. This Common land is all we can see of the world. In summer horsemen gallop along

the hillsides, and the golf players appear in silhouette on the evening skies. But in winter the Common is a waste. Yesterday I saw a bent figure making its way against the blast. A frost-bound and a soaking Common I have seen from the windows of the novitiate until my eyes turn from it in despair. Once, half in jest, half in earnest, I suggested to our Novice Mistress that we might have the blinds down and light the lamp. And when I look away from this terrible Common land I am confronted with the continual childishness of the nuns and the triviality of their interests; and the childishness within and the barren land beyond the walls seem to interact upon each other, and enforce the impression of living death. Of course I know that the triviality which shocks me is merely an outer skin which covers a great purpose. I try to remember this, but it is difficult for one who has lived long in the world to accept the trivial externality of scapulars and candles. And the trite religious instruction which we receive in the novitiate often jars. One of the things that shocks one most is the discovery that there are fashions in pieties as well as in petticoats. Not being able to imitate each others' bonnets, the nuns imitate each other's pieties. If one says the Rosary at a special hour, others want to do the same, and saints come into, and go out of, fashion. The Prioress's special saint, or the saint of any favourite nun, attracts a great deal of admiration, and for the proper stimulation of these special pieties it seems necessary to put up little shrines in the passages, and the erection and the maintenance of these shrines fall on me. The way the novices and postulants run to me for candles for the shrine of the saint that attracts their devotion at that particular moment is very trying; and it is hard not to tell them that they have merely exchanged their dolls for saints. So I philosophise in this fashion: "There are trivial-minded women," I say, "in convents as there are in the world, and the trivial-minded pray, as they play, in trivial fashion. To the fashionable woman the gown she is going to wear is the centre of things, and the whole of her life is spent seeking to escape from herself in little distractions. Only

a year ago the important to me was whether I could sing a scene as easily as another singer. The truth is, the external life is, and always must be, trivial."

In another letter to Monsignor she said :—

'One of my greatest consolations is to watch the evening as the sun sets in the violet distances of Richmond Park. I think it was Ulick Dean who first taught me to see the country in the fairy-like way in which I see it now. Or perhaps it is, and I think it is, that the country is a great consolation to everyone who has passed their first youth. The country you see has always been, there never was a time it did not exist. The country is nearly as immortal as the sky, and it is nearer to us. I don't think I could live in town again. When I leave here I shall live in the country. The last time I returned to Monmouth Mansions I looked round and I felt suddenly that I could not go on living in a flat. I felt I could not endure the daily routine, that I should have to do something else; then I felt the selfishness of it—getting up in the morning to discuss with my servant what we should eat. That is always the first thing one does in a flat, and then one thinks how one can spend the day most pleasantly to oneself. One thinks of the visits one may pay in the afternoon, and of the concerts and the theatres one may go to in the evening. To lead such a life year after year, knowing well that thousands have not sufficient food, nor a room to sit in, has become impossible to me. Then I need occupation. I am no longer interested in the things that used to interest me, and since I have been in this convent I have gone much further on the road on which I started when I first went to confess to you. So when I leave here, whether I live in England or in Italy, I shall live in the country, for my own sake and for the sake of others; for I have a little plan. I have thought that if I save two-thirds of my income I shall have enough money in three years to buy a cottage and a large garden. Once you get away from London land is not dear, and in Italy I daresay it is cheaper still.

'I used to do housework when a girl, and the convent has brought me back to it again, for here everyone has to sweep and to scrub and to brush. So I have thought that with another woman to help me, a sort of lady help, or a nurse, one who has been trained as a hospital nurse, we might be able to attend on ourselves and the six little cripple boys whom I would take to live with me. The little boys could work in the garden, and we could sell the vegetables and the eggs and the chickens, for of course we shall keep a poultry farm too; and I hear there is a good deal of money to be made by poultry. We could keep a pony and light cart, and one of the little boys, the one that was the least crippled, could look after the pony. There would not be much work to do in the cottage; for things do not get dirty in the country as they do in town, and there would not be much furniture—some plain tables and plain cupboards and plain shelves. The shelves will be painted green, and some nice green and yellow pottery will stand upon them. I must do something when I leave here, and I can think of nothing better than that; I am indeed very full of it, I think of it all day, and only fear that something will happen to prevent the realisation of my little plans. For things never come quite right in this world; the threads seem to slip out of our hands as we are going to tie the knot. There will be no wall round our garden, but a yew hedge will make a good background for flowers, lilies especially. The wall is one of the things that spoil the convent for me. But round my cottage, as I have said, there will be no wall, only a hedge, and all round for miles that sort of rich swelling country which I love—shady hillsides, and a little distance off a stream twisting through flat meadows by a sleepy town; such a stream as brought the swan to Elsa of Brabant; you see one cannot quite forget one's past. I long for the country and for my little home for crippled children. I once saw a hare beating a tambourine in Regent Street, and the beating of the tambourine by this woodland creature seemed to make an infinitely pathetic picture, and one which is strangely symbolic of many human lives. I long, as the poor hare must have longed, for wide

hillsides; and, landing on the highest point in the garden, I lose myself in the blue distances. I cannot tell you how I long for the return of the spring—I want to see the garden returning to life. Saint Francis used to sit talking to the fire, and worshipped the sun, or very nearly, and I like to watch the tall trees. How gaily they talk in a light wind, and how sadly they whisper when the wind dies, and in the dense winter rain they stand as miserable as animals in the rain.'

XX

'You see, Evelyn,' the Prioress said, 'it is contrary to the whole spirit of the religious life to treat the lay Sisters as servants, and though I am sure you did not intend any unkindness, they have complained to me once or twice of the way you order them about.'

'But, dear Mother, it seems to me that we're all inferior to the lay Sisters. To slight them—'

'I'm sure you did not do so intentionally.'

'I have said, "Do hurry up," but I only meant that I was in a hurry. I do not think anything you could have said could have pained me more.'

Seeing that Evelyn was hurt, the Prioress said the Sisters had no doubt forgotten all about it by now. But Evelyn wanted to know which of the Sisters had complained, so that she might beg her pardon.

'She does not want you to beg her pardon.'

'I beg you to allow me; it will be better that I should, the benefit will be mine.'

The Prioress shook her head, and the conversation passed from the lay Sisters to the difficult question of the contemplative and the active orders. Evelyn had lately been reading the story of a servant girl, who had discovered genius in herself, genius, Evelyn said, compared to the genius of Joan of Arc. It had all happened in a little seaport town, and it had begun in a sudden conviction which the new priest had felt when he entered the town for

the first time. As he ascended the avenue leading to the town he had heard a voice,—

'What have you come here for if not to rescue the aged poor?'

He wondered, not knowing how he was to do this, being bereft of all money. But the tissue of things had woven itself out miraculously—miraculous hands had always seemed weaving on that woof, and the first lives to be woven into it were the little seamstresses, who had sat amid the rocks on Sunday in front of the bright gorse asking each other what the priest had meant when he had made them promise never to be wanting in their duties of charity towards the aged poor; very likely the priest did not know himself when he exacted the promise from them.

Not till then does Jeanne, the marvellous, extraordinary Jeanne, appear in the story.

She had been a goat-herd in childhood, and the single event of her life in any way ominous of her mission was her refusal of an offer of marriage. A young sailor had been anxious to marry her, and she had at first seemed willing, and then, without knowing why, from some impulse, she had hesitated, and when he returned from a voyage she had told him she never intended to marry. The wonder of this lies in the fact that she never knew in the least why she had refused the sailor, nor why she was determined not to marry, and it was not for nearly twenty-seven years afterwards that the importance of this early act of renunciation had been revealed to her. For twenty years she worked in humble service. She attended a priest till he died, and then she went to live with his sister, and remained with her till she died. During all these twenty years Jeanne had saved only twenty-four pounds, and with this money she returned to her little seaport town, where there was no provision for the aged poor, where the aged poor starved in the streets or in garrets, in filth and vermin, in hunger and thirst, without hope of relief from anyone.

To this cruel little village Jeanne returned with her twenty-four pounds. She rented a garret with an old woman who was hardly able to help herself at all; and

every day she went to the market-place to find some humble employment; and so she lived till she was forty-seven. It was then that the two little seamstresses heard of her, and the Curé sent for her and told her of the good that might be done for the aged poor and the blind beggars and such like who prowled about the walls of the churches in rags and vermin. On leaving the priest she had said,—

'I do not understand, but I have never heard anyone speak so beautifully.'

But how were they, who could hardly support themselves, to support the poor? She did not know, but next day, when she went to see the priest, she understood everything, and it was in her garret that she harboured the first pauper, a poor blind woman, whom the seamstresses had discovered in the last stage of neglect and age. It was Jeanne who had discovered how they might support those who could not support themselves. It was she who seized the basket and said, 'I'll beg for them.'

'There is a genius for many things besides the singing of operas, the painting of pictures and the writing of books,' Evelyn said, 'and Jeanne's genius was begging for her poor folk. There is nothing more touching in the world's history than her journey in the milk cart to the regatta.'

She was accustomed to beg from door to door, but to intrude upon the crowd of fashionable folk bent on amusement she did not dare. Her courage almost failed her, but clasping the cross which hung round her neck, she entered the crowd of pleasure-seekers, saying, 'Won't you give me something for my poor folk?'

She begged with genius—a tall, thin, curious, fantastic figure, considered simple by some, but really gifted for the task which had been discovered to her in her middle age.

She begged that day and every day with genius. It is told that, bored by her persistence, a man had slapped her in the face, and that she had answered, 'That is perfectly right, that is just what is suited to me; now what are you going to give me for my poor folk?' On another occasion at some regatta or fancy fair, where wealth and pleasure had collected, some young men had teased her, and having

teased her they apologised and had given her five francs, and she had answered, 'At that price you may tease me as much as you please.'

'It is extraordinary to think how this woman, unlettered, unread and uncouth, had been able to invent a system of charity which has penetrated all over Europe. I do not know which,' Evelyn said, 'I realise most clearly, Jeanne or Teresa; they do not seem to me like women who have existed, but like women who always exist, who are part of the spiritual substance with which the world is made.'

The Prioress reminded Evelyn of Jeanne's start in the morning, when, after having made the beds and cleaned the garret, she took down her big basket.

'Now do not forget to ask for the halfpenny a week which I used to get at the grocery store.' 'Now I am sure you will forget to ask for my soup.'

Many used to hide their food under the bedclothes, and sell it surreptitiously for food for the pigs, leaving the Little Sisters almost starving; but their good humour was unfailing, they only said, 'So-and-so has not been so nice as usual this afternoon.'

'Yet, I cannot but feel—dear Mother, how am I to say it?—that the Little Sisters—'

'Do not be afraid, Evelyn,' the Prioress said; 'you mean that their way is perhaps a better way than ours.'

'It seems so, Mother, does it not?'

'My dear Evelyn, it is permissible to have doubts on such a subject—which is the better, acts of mercy or prayer? It is impossible not to doubt; we have all had our doubts on this subject, and it is the weakness of our intelligence that causes these doubts to arise.'

'How is that, Mother?' said Evelyn.

'It is so easy to realise the beauty of the relief of material suffering—the flesh is always with us; we realise so easily what it suffers, and the relief of suffering seems to us the only good. Suffering appeals to us through such direct channels. A hungry man always seems more real than a man who prays. But in truth bread and prayer are as necessary to man, one as the other. When the veil

of materialism is woven too densely, someone always comes to draw it aside.

'You have never heard the story of the foundation of our order. It will not appeal to the animal sympathies as readily as the foundation of the Little Sisters of the Poor, but I do not think it is less human.'

Then the Reverend Mother told how, in Lyons, a sudden craving for God had occurred in a time of extraordinary prosperity. Three young women, daughters of bankers and a silk merchant, surrounded with every luxury, wearied of their wealth and the pleasures which wealth brought them, had almost simultaneously decided, without any intercommunication, that this world is a vanity, and that they were willing to forego it.

This story went to the core of Evelyn's life. For she too had had wealth and fame and pleasure, and had found them to be nothing.

'But how,' she asked, 'had these women found that the world was not worthy of their seeking? Did they grow weary of it as I did, or was there a revelation?'

'There were three distinct revelations,' the Prioress replied. 'Their souls were long prepared for the revelation; they wearied of the luxury and materialism of their lives and the pleasures with which they were surrounded, and sought to escape from it. They were good women and they waited for a sign, which was vouchsafed them. They were not women who were specially gifted like Jeanne to attend on the poor. At Lyons, at that time, the poor were not so plentiful as they were in the little seaport town, and it was towards prayer the souls of these good women turned rather than to good works. It appears they suddenly craved for prayer as they might have for light. They felt the world was dying, for no one prayed. But how to give a practical form to their idea they didn't know. Maybe they doubted, as we all doubt in moments of weakness, the utility of prayer, and argued against their instincts. One certainly did. She herself tells how, unable to decide whether she should embrace a practical or a contemplative life, she knelt down while a great fire was blazing in the town. Owing to the strength of the wind, the

firemen could not extinguish it. The fire was in one of the great silk warehouses, but it was not for the preservation of her father's wealth that she prayed, but for the safety of an asylum for the aged which adjoined the warehouse, and which at that moment seemed sure of destruction. She was hardly on her knees when the wind suddenly lulled, and the flames were extinguished. And at the same moment she heard a voice in her heart saying to her quite plainly, "If one prayer can do this, what might not an order do whose mission it is to pray." Her father, of course, told her that she was mistaken, and that she had heard no voice. But of what use is it tell those who have heard a voice that they have not heard it?'

'And the other two girls—were each of them vouchsafed a sign?' Evelyn asked.

'Yes, in each case there was a sign. One was to be married to a rich silk merchant—a man whom she could not care for under any circumstances, and who was doubly repugnant to her now she had conceived the idea of a religious life—a man full of worldliness, and concerned only with this world. There seemed no escape for her, and she felt she had not the power to resist the will of her entire family, so she turned to God and begged of Him to provide some means of escape. Next day her suitor told her he could not marry her. In the night it had been revealed to him that this could not be. He had struggled against the conviction, and he had argued with himself, but in vain. He could explain nothing, except that it was so.'

'And the third one?' Evelyn asked.

'The third incident was perhaps even more striking. She was walking through a wood, and on the other side of the river she saw two men engaged in a duel. She heard afterwards that this duel was to be fought to the death. But they were evenly matched and neither could vanquish the other. They returned to the contest again and again, and, in the face of this murder to be committed, she knelt down and prayed that it might be averted. Suddenly one declared he could fight no further, a conviction having been borne suddenly in upon him that he was doing wrong, and, unable to resist it, he told his enemy what had happened,

saying, "It matters not in the least to me if you consider me a coward, I cannot continue this fight." These three women confided their experiences to the same confessor. The priest himself had long been meditating a convent for men or women whose lives should be wholly devoted to prayer, for it had been borne in upon him too that some make-weight was necessary in this city wholly devoted to the making of money and to the pleasures which money can buy."

Evelyn was interested in the story of these three founders of the order — these three women born among the sins of luxury in a materialistic society, to whom had come three distinct revelations. She was about to ask the Prioress the intimate history of the first foundation when the Reverend Mother interrupted, as it were, her thoughts, and said,—

'Any depreciation of the active orders is of course out of the question, but the desire to understand them is not depreciation. The good done by the active orders in the world is more obvious, more readily understood by the average man, who will say, "Ah, the Little Sisters of the Poor—I understand that; but the Carmelites, who merely pray, of what good are they?" But all that the average man does not understand is not necessarily useless. The truth is that the active orders and the contemplative orders are identical when we look below the surface.'

'How is that, Mother?'

'The mission of the active orders is to relieve physical suffering, and they accomplish a great deal, but not in the direction which the world thinks. The world thinks that the object of the Little Sisters of the Poor is the elimination of suffering from the world, or at least the reduction of suffering.'

'Surely their efforts make an appreciable difference in the sufferings of the world?'

'My dear child, a certain amount of suffering is inseparable from human life. If you eliminate on one side the growth is greater on the other. By preserving the lives of the old people you make the struggle harder for others. There is much the same amount of suffering in the world as

there was before the Little Sisters of the Poor began their work. It is very doubtful whether the suffering to-day is not equal to the amount of suffering that existed fifty years before the order came into existence. That is what I mean.'

'Then, dear Mother, the order does not fulfil its purpose?'

'On the contrary, Evelyn, it fulfils its purpose, but its purpose is not that which the world thinks. It is by the noble example they set that the Little Sisters of the Poor achieve their purpose. It is by forsaking the world that they achieve their purpose, by their manifestation that the things of this world are not worth considering. They pray largely in outward acts, whereas the contemplative orders pray only in thought — the purpose, as I have said, of both is identical, that this world is a negligible quantity. The good they do is by the creation of an atmosphere of goodness. There are two atmospheres in this world—the atmosphere of good and the atmosphere of evil, and both are created by thought, whether thought in the concrete form of an act or by thought in its purest form, an aspiration. All those who devote themselves to prayer, whether their prayers take the form of good works or whether their prayer passes in thought, collaborate in the production of a moral atmosphere, and it is the moral atmosphere created by prayer which enables man to continue in human life.

'Of the power of thought over matter I have given you three instances; but you, my dear Evelyn, need less proof of it than any other, for have you not often told me how our prayers, on more than one occasion, have saved you from the evil designs of your lover?'

'As you state it, Mother, it seems clear; I did not think of it in that way before.'

'How interesting it would be to write the history of an order, the central idea of which should be the power of thought over matter.'

But the three nuns who came to England about thirty years ago to make the English foundation did not interest Evelyn very keenly. Her interest was not caught until the Prioress told her how, just at the time when they seemed on

the point of failure, a young girl, in the best society, rich, beautiful, and surrounded by admirers, came to think, just as Evelyn had done, that the life of the world was a mere vanity, and had decided to dedicate her life to God. Her story was this :—

'She had been educated in a convent, and when she left, after her first ball, she told her father and mother that she wished to be a nun. Her parents besought her to consider her resolution and she agreed to do this, and for two years she went to balls and parties, seemingly the most worldly among her companions ; but at the end of a year of her probationship in the world she said, "I have waited a year, because you wished me to, and now I have come to tell you that I wish to enter a convent." You see how analogous her story is to yours, Evelyn. It was the same vocation that brought you both here. It was with five thousand pounds out of the thirty thousand that this girl gave that the nuns bought the old country house in which we are now living. The late Prioress is blamed for this extravagance, and I think very unjustly, for how could she have foreseen the increased taxation. As a growing suburb the taxation became heavier.'

Then Evelyn heard that a portion of the old house had been put aside for guest-rooms ; but the boarders who came were of the non-paying sort—penniless converts turned out by their relations, governesses, etc. And she heard how no more rich postulants came to the convent, and of the money the convent had lost in the railway, and how it came to be lost at a most unfortunate time, as only a few days before the lawyer had written to say that the Australian mine, in which most of their money was invested, had become bankrupt. So there was no help for it, they had to mortgage the property, and that was the beginning of their real difficulties, for as the land became valuable, the mortgagees became more and more anxious to foreclose. Once the convent had been late in paying the yearly interest on the money they had borrowed, and the mortgagees had insisted upon the penal interest.

'But, my dear Reverend Mother, I have offered to lend you the money.'

'It is impossible for us to take your money, Evelyn; we want a great deal of money, and a more legitimate means must be found than borrowing from you. The convent roof wants re-slating and the chapel wants re-decorating, and we spare every penny we can from our food and clothing to buy candles for the altar; and the twelve candles that have to burn there are quite an item in themselves; and another item, and a very considerable one, is the expense of the resident chaplain. The nearest parish is some distance, and cannot supply a priest every day. Frankly, Evelyn, we are at our wit's end.'

'You have no idea, Mother, how all you have said interests me, and the personal application I make of it to my own life. You said just now that you hoped one day I should become a member of this community. I am well aware how incongruous it would be to have me in a convent, and how ill my past life accords with your lives; but I have long wished to be a nun—the idea has been growing within me, and as far as I know it is quite a sincere one; but there is an impediment, and it is that that is breaking my heart—I do not see how I can become a nun. I am so happy here that I dread the letter which will come and order me away from you.'

'Then your anxiety is not that you should fail to live according to our rule?'

'Not in the least, Mother, the reason is not a personal one; it is on account of my father. You see I cannot forsake him a second time; forgive me, Mother, for of course the motive is quite a different one, but I cannot forsake my father.'

The Prioress asked her if she had spoken to Monsignor on this subject or if she had laid the matter frankly before her father, telling him that she believed she had a vocation for a religious life.

She said she had not consulted Monsignor at all nor her father in the explicit manner in which the Prioress seemed to think she should have done. The blood flew to her face, and she laughed a little, and then confessed, with some reluctance and a sense of incongruity, that it was Owen Asher who had told her that her duty lay with her father

and not at all with the convent, and that by going into a convent she was only obeying a personal inclination, and according to her new conception of life personal inclination was the very thing which should be avoided on all occasions. He had therefore bidden her go to her father, this was her last obedience to him; and she had promised her father to go to him as soon as he was settled in Rome and was ready to receive her.

The conversation paused, and then Evelyn asked the Prioress to advise her.

'I cannot forsake my father, can I? Owen Asher was quite right when he told me I must go and live with my father.'

'The advice comes to you in a very doubtful way, my dear child, and from an equivocal side; I will only say you have reason to doubt the counsel of a man who was capable of acting towards a young girl as he acted towards you; I will not say any more—at least not for the present.'

'But you will think over it, dear Mother, and tell me.'

Late that night a telegram came from Rome telling Evelyn that her father was dangerously ill, and that she was to start at once for Rome.

XXI

THE wind had gathered the snow into the bushes and all the corners of the common, and the whole earth seemed but a little brown patch, with a dead grey sky sweeping by. For many months the sky had been grey, and heavy clouds had passed slowly, like a funeral, above the low horizon. The wind had torn the convent garden until nothing but a few twigs remained; even the laurels seemed about to

lose their leaves. The nuns had retreated with blown skirts; Sister Mary John had had to relinquish her digging, and her jackdaw had sought shelter in the hen-house.

One night when the nuns assembled for evening prayer, the north wind seemed to lift the roof as with hands; the windows were shaken; the nuns divined the wrath of God in the wind, and Miss Dingle, who had learnt, through pious incantations, that the Evil One would attempt a descent into the convent, ran to warn the porteress of the danger. At that moment the wind was so loud that the porteress listened perforce to the imaginings of Miss Dingle's weak brain, thinking, in spite of herself, that some communication had been vouchsafed to Miss Dingle. 'Who knows,' her thoughts said, 'who can say; the ways of Providence are inscrutable;' and she looked at the little daft woman as if she were a messenger.

As they stood calculating the strength of the lock and hinges the door bell suddenly began to jingle.

'He would not ring the bell; he would come down the chimney,' said Miss Dingle.

'But who can it be,' said the porteress, 'and at this hour?'

'This will save you;' Miss Dingle thrust a rosary into the nun's hand and fled down the passage; 'be sure to throw it over his neck.'

The nun tried to collect her scattered thoughts and her courage. Again the bell jingled; this time the peal seemed crazier than the first, and rousing herself into action, she asked through the grating who it might be.

'It is I, Sister Evelyn; open the door quickly, Sister Agnes.'

The nun held the door open, thanking God it was not the Devil, and Evelyn dragged her trunk through the door, letting it drop upon the mat abruptly.

'Tell dear Mother I want to speak to her—say that I must see her—be sure you say that, and I will wait for her in the parlour.'

'There is no light there; I will fetch one.'

'Never mind, don't trouble. I don't want a light; but go to the Reverend Mother and tell her I must see her before I see anyone else.'

There could be no doubt that something grave had happened, and the porteress hurried down the passage. Evelyn sat at the table looking into the darkness, thinking of the last time she had been in this room. It was just a month ago that she had been called away to Rome. For days he had fluctuated between life and death, sometimes waking to consciousness, then falling back into trance. In spite of the hopes the doctors had held out to him, he insisted that he was dying. 'I am worn to a thread,' he said. 'I shall flicker like that candle when it reaches the socket—and then I shall go out. But I am not afraid of death—death is a great experience, and we are all better for every experience. There is only one thing—'

He was thinking of his work; he was sorry he was called away before his work was done; and then he seemed to forget it, to be absorbed in things of greater importance.

And Evelyn thought she must have drowsed a little as she sat waiting for the sound of the nun's soft woollen slippers in the hall, for now the Prioress stood beside her she had not heard her come in.

'My dear Evelyn, you need not tell me, I know what has happened. Come, let us kneel down and say a prayer.'

She was about to say she needed no prayer, but the impulse to obey the Reverend Mother was stronger, and the prayer they said seemed to quiet her grief, and she began to speak of the month she had spent in Rome. Once the Reverend Mother sought to dissuade her from the painful story, but seeing that it relieved her to tell it she allowed her to tell, and she told it in her impetuous way. Sometimes the wind interrupted the Prioress's attention, and she thought of the safety of her roofs, and once Evelyn noticed the wind, and her notice of it served to accentuate the terror of her grief. 'I waited by his bedside seeing the soul prepare for departure. The soul begins to leave the body several days before it goes; it flies round and round like a bird that is going to some distant country. I must tell you all about it, Mother. He lay for hours and hours, looking into a corner of the room. I am sure he saw something there; and one night I heard him call me. I went to him and asked him what he wanted; but he lay quite quiet,

looking into the corner of the room, and then he said, "The wall has been taken away." I know he saw something there. He saw something, he learnt something in that last moment that we do not know. That last moment is the only real moment of our lives, the only true moment —all the rest is falsehood, delirium, froth. The rest of life is contradictions, distractions and lies, but in the moment before death I am sure everything becomes quite clear to us. Then we learn what we are. We do not know ourselves until then. If I ask who am I, what am I, there is no answer. We do not believe in ourselves, because we do not know who we are; we do not know enough of ourselves to believe in anything. We do not believe; we acquiesce that certain things are so because it is necessary to acquiesce, but we do not believe in anything, not even that we are going to die; for if we did we should live for death and not for life. Oh, Mother, I am very different from the woman who left the convent a month ago. To sit by a dying man, day after day, and talk of death is a great experience. It is not so much what he says to you about death as what you can read in his face; no, not read, you guess the truths which he is beginning to experience.

'I know that my father knew the truth before he died. Yes, he was always a Catholic—that is not what I mean; I mean the real belief that comes at that moment, when we know what we are and where we are going. We are certain of everything then. Then we believe as we have never believed before. You will tell me that those who live in the world believe in God—so they do, I suppose, in a way; they acquiesce; but if they really believed, if they knew, as my father knew before he died, they would give up everything and go about in rags, and pray, and lose themselves in thoughts of God. They would forget to eat, they would not notice hunger or thirst; and they would fade away, their eyes fixed upon something that we may not see—that something which my father saw before he died. Even here, in this convent of perpetual adoration, you do not seem to me to believe enough, for if you believed that God were really there, on the altar, you would neither eat nor

drink; you would remain kneeling until you lost yourselves in death—until you found your true selves.'

'After an experience like yours, Evelyn, one sees life quite differently, and it is through such experiences that we discover our real selves and the way that God intends us to walk in. It is only through great grief that we come to know ourselves. We can easily dispense with our joys; but no one would forego any great sorrow they have been through. I believe we would endure it all over again rather than that we should be as we were before.'

'Mother, all that is real in life is our sense of its unreality.'

'But we are here for God's own purpose; we must remember that. We must live because it is God's holy will.'

'Sometimes it is difficult to live; there are times when it seems much easier to die.'

'My dear child, I have been through what you are going through now, and it may help you to know that in times of great sorrow it is easier to live in a convent than it is to live in the world. You know what our life is. You will find its simplicity a help.'

'Will you have me in the convent?'

'Yes, of course we will. You did not think we should close our door on you in your trouble. You came to us in our trouble.'

'I knew you wouldn't, Mother.'

She stretched out her hand, and clasping the old nun's hand she told her of her journey to Rome, of her life in Rome, of her daily prayers in a certain church. She spoke of the nurses, of the doctors and the funeral, and then burst into tears, and the Prioress strove to calm her in vain. Evelyn reproached herself for having allowed her father to go to Rome without her. The convent had been a temptation, and she had yielded to it as she had to other temptations. Then seeing that she had pained the Reverend Mother, she asked her to forgive her.

'It is hard to distinguish sometimes between right and wrong; it should be easy, but it isn't, and I know that it pleased me to help the convent with my singing. I do not

know that that is not why I have come here. Is my grief real grief? Sometimes I forget it; sometimes I find myself thinking of indifferent things—of what I shall sing for you at Benediction—at other times I am overwhelmed in grief, and then through all my grief the thought comes: that this is as it should be.'

The wise Prioress did not answer her. A few moments seemed a great while, and she awoke from her trance to hear the Prioress telling her that she had experienced a great sorrow very early in her life; it had been the means of awakening in her that sense of the unreality of things which comes to us all sooner or later; and in the midst of her grief Evelyn wondered how this woman had survived her grief for forty years; how she still ruled her convent according to her idea.

Evelyn did not know it, but the Prioress knew that her will had gone out to Evelyn like a friend, and she knew that her eyes had a power; and she wished Evelyn to lose her individuality in a rule of life clear and explicit. And Evelyn wished the same. Obedience had come to seem the only sweetness left in the world. Her past life, all of it—she did not except a single year, not even her postulancy—it all seemed trivial and amateurish: now she was to begin the serious business of life.

XXII

Next morning she felt that to make her own bed in the morning and to eat simple food in silence were part of the serious business of life. After breakfast she was sent to the sacristy to assist Veronica, and she was glad to be sent into the garden to get some laurel leaves. But she wandered, unable to collect her thoughts sufficiently to find what she was sent for, until Sister Mary John came from her digging and asked her what she was seeking. Evelyn had for-

gotten, and it was with an effort she remembered. She had been sent to gather laurel leaves.

'I will gather them for you; I know where they are. Take my spade and dig a little while.'

'I do not know how to dig.'

'I'll show you. This is a bed for spring onions, and it wants digging out. You press the spade in as far as you can, pull down the handle so, and take out the earth.'

She did as she was bidden, and suddenly she felt that she must dig to live. The smell of the earth refreshed her, and as a bleak wind was blowing, she had to dig hard to keep herself warm. She worked on till she had to pause for breath, and, leaning on her spade, she looked round, and saw that the trees before breaking into leaf had become grey. She wandered a little way from her digging, and, watched some crocuses pushing through the loose earth. She pondered, wishing herself alone with Nature amid mountains or by the seashore. Suddenly she heard a singing in the air; a lark flew from the common, uttering its incessant song—a quaint interval, reminding her of the bagpipes, and then a passionate cry of joy—two notes uttered again and again. 'A love call' Evelyn thought it must be, and the bird fell suddenly, swooping, gliding along the air. 'To its nest,' Evelyn thought, 'to its mate.'

She had forgotten her work, but she was not thinking of her father; her mind was vague, and the lark had rearisen, or was it another bird flying towards her? 'It must be the same,' she thought; 'the same common cannot produce two birds that sing so beautifully.' She had never cared to hear a bird sing before, and she wondered if the reason were that she had moved a little nearer to Nature.

Miss Dingle stood at a little distance, exorcising some gooseberry bushes with her rosary. She withdrew like a timid animal, but curiosity was stronger than fear, and she came back like one who wanted to talk to someone, and, hoping to encourage her, Evelyn asked her if she had seen the Devil lately. She hung down her head and retreated, but when she turned away, Evelyn heard her say that she had not seen much of him lately, only once that morning.

'He gets more artful, you know, but he is about; I know he is about.'

She came back to Evelyn and began to tell her where she might see the Devil if she wished, if she were not afraid.

'The bushes grow very thick in that corner, and I don't like to go there. . . . I have hunted him out of these bushes. He is not here. You needn't be afraid. My rosary has been over them all.'

Evelyn could see that Miss Dingle wished her to exercise the dangerous corner, and she offered to do so.

'You have two rosaries; you might lend me one.'

'No, I don't think I could. I want two; one for each hand, you see. . . . I have not seen you in the garden this last day or two. You have been away, haven't you?'

'I have been in Rome.'

'In Rome! Then why don't you go there,' she said, pointing to the dangerous corner, 'and frighten him away? You don't need a rosary if you have touched the precious relics. You would be able to drive him out of the garden, and out of the park too, perhaps, though the park is a very big place. But here comes Sister Mary John. You will tell me another time if you have brought back anything that the Pope has worn.'

Sister Mary John came striding over the broken earth, followed by her jackdaw. The bird stopped to pick up a fat worm, and the nun sent Miss Dingle away very summarily.

'I can't have you here, Alice. Go to the summer-house and drive the Devil away with your holy pictures. There's not time for you, dear, either,' she said to the jackdaw, who had just alighted on her shoulder. And, looking up and down a plot of ground twenty yards long and about ten wide, protected from the east wind by a high yew hedge, she said, 'This is the rhubarb bed, and this piece,' she said, walking to another plot between the yew hedge and the gooseberry bushes, 'will have to be dug up; we were short of vegetables last year.'

At the prospect of so much digging Evelyn's courage failed her, and she was relieved to hear that one of these beds had been dug in the autumn, and that no more would be required from her than the hoeing out of the weeds.

But she found hoeing harder work than she had expected, and when she had cleared a large piece of weeds she had to go over the ground again, having missed a great many.

At dinner time she thought she was too tired to eat, but Sister Mary John consoled her with the assurance that she would soon get accustomed to the work, and in order that she might do so, the nun kept her digging from week's end to week's end. Evelyn said she had found salvation in the garden, but Sister Mary John answered that an absent-minded person was no saving of labour in a garden; and without further words the nun told her she was to go in front with a dibble and make holes for the potatoes, for Sister Mary John said she could not be trusted with the seed potatoes, that she would be sure to break the shoots. Sister Mary John seemed to think that she should know by instinct that French beans need not be set as closely together as the scarlet runners; nor could the nun understand that it was possible to live twenty years in the world without knowing that broad beans must be trodden firmly into the ground.

In about three weeks their work was done in the kitchen garden, and Sister Mary John said they must weed the flower beds or there would be no flowers for the Virgin in May. They weeded the beds for many days, filling in the gaps with plants from the nursery. Soon after came the seed sowing: mignonette, sweet peas, stocks, larkspurs, poppies and nasturtiums, all of which should have been sown earlier, the nun said, only the vegetables had taken all their time, and there was no one but she who cared for the garden. They all liked to see the flowers on the altar, 'but not one of them will tie up her habit and dig, and they are as ignorant as you are, dear.'

'Sister, that is unkind. I've learnt as much as could be expected in a month.'

'You're not so careless as you were.'

'I had a friend,' Evelyn said, 'who used to hear the earth as we hear voices, or very nearly. . . . How mysteriously soft the wind blows over the common.'

'God created the earth before He created man,' the nun said, as she passed on, weeding rapidly and skilfully. 'Our love of the earth is deeper than our love of art.'

Sister Mary John pointed to the daffodils that a warm night had nearly brought to blossom, and Evelyn followed the nun with her eyes, as she wandered by the beds. She moved so silently and worked so instinctively that she seemed as much a part of the garden as the wind, or the rain, or the sun.

XXIII

Evelyn perceived the wisdom of the Prioress in these long mornings spent in manual work. Veronica, on account of her age, could not reprove her, nor could she submit herself so easily to Veronica's authority, and she often stood looking through the sacristy forgetful of the half-cleaned candlestick in her hand. In these moments the cup of life seemed unendurably bitter; a long life in the convent affrighted her, and she could not return to the world. To remember that she was alone and would have to go on living had become a grief that pierced her like a sword; a sense of desolation swept over her mind; sometimes in the midst of her singing she would lose control over herself, and the Sister would look round from the organ, fearing she would not be able to continue her song.

'She must take the veil,' the Prioress said to herself as she knelt in her stall; 'nothing else will set her free from her grief.' The Prioress remembered the great relief that the mere putting on of the habit brings to the soul; and she rose from her knees quite determined. She would be opposed by Mother Hilda, but Mother Hilda would not have Mother Philippa's support.

'I look upon her past life,' the sub-Prioress said, 'as so much dead wood; all the rubble and wreck must be cleared away before the new growth can begin in her. You will agree, Mother, that the veil makes a great difference; it's

like marriage after a long engagement—you know what I mean, dear Mother.'

'Yes, I think I do,' the Prioress answered, looking approvingly at the sub-Prioress. 'When one has taken the white veil, the past is behind us, one knows where one is going. But I fear, Mother Hilda, that you are not with us in this matter.'

'It's because of Evelyn's present state of mind that I do not feel sure that this is the best moment for her to receive the white veil. When her mood passes, as it will pass, she may think quite differently.'

'I do not think that,' the Prioress said. 'A more serious objection is that she has only been in the novitiate three months.'

'And her postulancy has been broken by a month in Rome. It should begin again,' said Mother Hilda.

'On that point the bishop will have to be consulted,' and she tried to conciliate Mother Hilda by reminding her that Monsignor had telegraphed for Evelyn. 'Her journey to Rome, you will admit, was quite unavoidable. Will you tell her, Mother Hilda, when you go downstairs, that I shall be glad to see her in my room?'

And when Evelyn came to the Prioress's room she was addressed as *Sister Teresa*, and the Prioress told her that she had chosen that name on account of Evelyn's admiration for the saint's writings and character.

'I felt I should like to call you Teresa, and you will prove yourself worthy of the name, my dear child.'

'But, Mother, my postulancy!'

'Hasn't the Mother Mistress told you that I intend to lay your case before the bishop. To-morrow you go into the week's retreat which precedes the clothing. And now you must think of your past life as being really behind you; you are Evelyn Innes no longer, you are Sister Teresa.'

'But my past, dear Mother, has been behind me this long while. There can be no manner of doubt about that. I am filled with wonder when I think of the life I used to lead before my conversion.'

'You feel that you could not return to the world?'

'To my old friends, to those who still pursue shadows?

No, dear Mother, I could not go back to the world, to the stage, and sing operas for the money and applause I should get by singing.'

'That I believe; but do you think that the life here is the most suitable to you? Is it the life of your deliberate choice? Remember that there are many other rules of life—there are the active orders.'

'Dear Mother, there is no time for thinking any more; I must act. I cannot tell you if the rule here is more suitable than some other rule which I have not tried. I have had some experience of your rule; if you will take me I am yours. If you do not'—she stopped, and stood looking at the Reverend Mother—'I cannot think what will happen. I've been through a great deal, and feel that I am unequal to any further experiments. Don't you know what I mean?'

'Oh, yes, I think I know very well indeed. . . . You are still suffering from the shock of your father's death.'

'My father's death, dear Mother, was a great shock to me, but his death was only a link in a very long chain; from the very beginning it was all ordained, every step was marked out. At the time I did not understand why I was perplexed, why I had doubts, but things have become much clearer. In my youth I accepted the conventions, but there was always an uneasy feeling in my heart. This feeling was in me in the beginning, but it died away; for years I think I must have lived without scruples of any kind. My tether was a long one; I wandered far, but suddenly I came to the end of it. That's how it was.'

'You see, my dear child, my responsibility in admitting you to the convent is a great one. Convince me that you have a vocation, and I shall not mind the responsibility.'

'How shall I convince you, Mother?'

'By telling me your story, by telling me everything you know about yourself. If I am a nun, I am an old woman, and I suffered deeply before I came here.'

Evelyn told her story from the day she met Owen Asher to the day she went to confession to Monsignor.

'And the strange part of it is that I would not marry. Owen Asher often asked me to marry him, but something

always held me back from marriage. Ulick Dean nearly succeeded;' and she told of the extraordinary lassitude which had overcome her one evening, how she had sat in her armchair looking at the fire, unable to get up. 'My tether was a sense of that one sin, for I always felt it to be wrong to live with a man who was not your husband; but it was not until my father died that I began to perceive that my life was wrong from end to end. It usen't to seem wrong to me to spend months learning an opera and singing it for a great deal of money, or to spend as much on a dress as a workman and his family could live on for a whole year. But I think I always thought it wrong to live with Owen Asher, and as I did not want to give up living with him, I was forced to deny God. Owen Asher knew all the atheistical arguments very well, and I read all the books he gave me to read. But to live without faith, dear Mother, is a nightmare. Driving home in the brougham after singing, I never failed to ask myself, What is the use of all this? it is all over now. Sometimes before I went down to the theatre I used to say, "In three hours—in four hours it will be all over, and then it will be the same as if I hadn't sung at all!" If one doesn't believe in God, life ceases to have a meaning; that is the atheist's difficulty. Owen Asher used to feel the same as I did. I remember his once stopping me; he looked round suddenly, and there was such conviction in his eyes when he said, "Evelyn, there's nothing in it. I've tried everything, and there's nothing in it." Still he goes on living, pursuing pleasures in which he knows there is nothing except disappointment.

'Looking back upon my life, that is how I see it. I cannot live without faith, without authority, without guidance. I am weak, I require authority. I am bound to tell you all these things so that you may be able to decide whether I have a vocation.'

'The ways by which we come back to God are many, and I think I understand very well how you have been brought back. This convent was but an instrument in His hands for the purpose of bringing you back, and it may be it has served its purpose now and you can return to the

world. One can love God in the world and serve Him in the world. Some serve Him best in the world, some in the convent. When your grief has died down a little you may be able to return to the world.'

The Prioress waited for Evelyn to answer, but she did not answer, and she said,—

'My dear child, tell me of what you are thinking; confide in me.'

'It's just that, Mother—what I have told you. I cannot live without faith, and if I leave the convent I lose my faith, or part of it. Even in the month I spent in Rome I lost something. Dogma does not appeal to me as much as practice, and Rome is full of worldly ecclesiastics who quarrel and abuse each other and contradict each other. I hardly dare to say it, but their worldliness, or what seemed to me their worldliness, was near destroying my faith again. It is only here that I can believe as I want to believe. Here everyone is humble, here everyone has renounced the lust of the flesh; so I know that you all believe, for your lives prove it.'

'We prayed, and our prayer was answered. Prayer is the only real power in the world, my dear Teresa, and you have had proof of the efficacy of our prayers; and if anyone here needed proof of the efficacy of prayer she would find it in you—how you came here, how you were brought here, is surely one of the most wonderful things in the world, and yet one of the most natural, if one thinks of it.'

The Prioress got up from her chair, and Evelyn followed her to the novitiate, where the novices were making the dress that Evelyn was to wear when she received the white veil.

'You see, Teresa, we spare no expense or trouble on your dress,' said the Prioress.

'Oh, it's no trouble, dear Mother;' and Sister Angela rose from her chair and turned the dress right side out and shook it, so that Evelyn might admire the handsome folds into which the silk fell.

'And see, here is the wreath,' said Sister Jerome, picking up a wreath of orange blossom from a chair.

'And what do you think of your veil, Sister Teresa?

Sister Rufina did this feather-stitch; hasn't she done it beautifully?'

Evelyn examined the veil, and her interest was sincere in it, for she believed that the ritual and its symbolic garments were necessary to complete the inward conviction that she was liberated from the world.

'And Sister Rufina is making your wedding-cake. Mother Philippa has told her to put in as many raisins and currants as she pleases; yours will be the richest cake we have ever had in the convent.' Sister Angela spoke very demurely, for she was thinking of the portion of the cake that would come to her, and there was a little gluttony in her voice as she spoke of the almond paste it would have upon it.

'It is indeed a pity,' said Sister Jerome, 'that Sister Teresa's clothing takes place so early in the year.'

'How so, Sister Jerome?' Evelyn asked incautiously.

'Because if it had been a little later, or if Monsignor had not been delayed in Rome—I only thought,' she added, stopping short, 'that you would like Monsignor to give you the white veil—it would be nicer for you, or if the bishop gave it,' she added, 'or Father Ambrose. I am sure Sister Veronica never would have been a nun at all if Father Ambrose had not professed her. Father Daly is such a little frump.'

'That will do, children. I cannot really allow our chaplain to be spoken of in that manner.'

The Prioress and Evelyn descended the novitiate stairs together, and the Prioress said,—

'I think, dear Teresa, your retreat had better begin to-morrow.'

XXIV

The silence of the convent had once seemed to her a hardship, and now these extra hours of silence seemed to her no hardship at all, and she passed a whole week without

speaking, and in special humility of the spirit. She accepted all Mother Hilda's instruction as a patient accepts her medicines. She looked forward to the gown, the veil, the wreath and the ceremony as the patient looks forward to the doctor's ordinances, and she was anxious to exceed the rule, to do a little more than it required of her. The stage had enabled her to escape from herself, her vows were a more serious escapement, and on the day of her clothing she was the most infantile nun in the convent. She joined in all the babble and laughter, and her appreciation of the wedding-cake exceeded Sister Agatha's. But she over-did it a little, and in the midst of her gaiety her mood changed, and she asked if she might go into the garden. Sister Jerome was particularly noisy that afternoon, her unceasing humour had begun to jar, and Evelyn felt she must get away from it.

It was a relief to watch the gardener.

He was mowing between the flower-beds, and the thick young grass that had just grown up after the winter lay along the lawn in irregular lines; and she noticed that the summer had not yet covered the earth, and that brown patches showed among grey-green tulip leaves, the tall May tulips which the Dutchmen used to paint. She looked towards the orchard, where the white pear blossom was shedding, and the apple blossom was beginning to show in tight pink knots amid brown boughs.

The convent pets had increased, and Evelyn in her walk round the garden met three goslings straying under the flowering laburnums. She returned them to their mother in the orchard, and a little farther on she came upon the cat playing with the long-lost tortoise. He had found the tortoise among the potato ridges, and, sitting in front of it, tapped the black head whenever it appeared beyond the shell. And holding the great grey tom cat by his front paws she decided to carry him to the other end of the garden, to where sparrows were pecking up the sweet peas. And then she wandered in St Peter's Walk, watching the young leaves swinging.

The mystery of the spring seemed afloat in the misty distances, and standing on the terrace, her eyes fixed on the wooded horizon, she thought of the Birmingham girl

whose renunciation of the world had been much more complete than hers had been that morning. For the order of the Carmelites was more severe than that of the Passionists. She remembered the lilacs in the courtyard, and the smell of the wax inside the church, and the quavering voices of the nuns, and the priest's intoning of the Veni Creator. She did not linger over these external appearances—she was more concerned with her personal impression. Three years ago the ceremony had seemed to her like a gross mediæval superstition. She remembered how it had frightened her. That a girl should choose to forego lover, husband, children, riches, fame—everything! All these things might have been hers, but she had put them away, knowing them to be vain things.

Evelyn remembered how even then she had begun to perceive the unreality of the things which the world calls real things. Yet on the day of the girl's clothing it had seemed to her that for a time one should be the dupe of that illusion which the world calls reality. It had seemed to her that the girl should have tasted of the cup before she had refused it. She could have sympathised with a renunciation, but she could not then sympathise with a refusal. She could not admit that anyone should know from the beginning that the world was a vain thing; such precocity; and conflicted with her prejudice. She remembered how she had been taken with a sudden impulse to ask this girl what reason had compelled her to refuse life, and how she had followed Merat through a side door and down a passage. She had come to a room divided by a grating, and behind the grating she had seen the girl, her face suffused with tears, and she had not been able to ask what she had come to ask. The conviction that the girl could not answer her had stayed the question on her lips. The mere sight of the girl had told her that she had been led by a sublime instinct beside which the wisdom of all the philosophers was very little. . . .

That girl had known the truth from the beginning, and had confirmed her conviction by an act, and Evelyn remembered that even at that time her own feet were on the way that had led her to the convent. But how incredulous

she would have looked if anyone had told her then that in a little while she would stand a nun on the terrace of the Wimbledon convent.

There was no doubt that she was greatly changed, and yet it was the strange discomfort of her clothes that reminded her she was a nun—the voluminous trailing habit with its wide, hanging sleeves, and, smiling, she thought that this stiff, white head-dress made her feel more like a nun than her vows.

She stood, her eyes fixed on the horizon. It had changed from blue to violet, the evening was growing more beautiful. Evelyn had begun to feel that she would stand looking at it for ever, and it was at that moment that the rosy-cheeked porteress came tripping down the terrace to tell her that a lady had called to see her.

'The lady is in the parlour. Mother Hilda is with her, and she has sent me for you.'

It was Louise who had called to see her, but when Evelyn entered the parlour Mother Hilda was not there, and she was not certain if she should remain.

'I can see you are doubtful whether you should stay with me, Evelyn; how is it that you can accept such obedience? And that ridiculous gown, those sleeves and that head-dress! I hear you were Clothed to-day. You have had your hair cut off. But is this the Evelyn, the Evelyn with whom I used to sing?'

'Yes, dear Louise, it is I; and it is kind of you to come here. But how did you find me out? Let me know before Mother Hilda returns. We shall not be able to talk freely before her. This opportunity is quite exceptional.'

'But, Evelyn, your gown distracts me. Well, it was accident that gave me your address. Owen Asher did not know it.'

'Louise, you must not talk to me of him. Though I should like to know he is well. Nor must you talk to me of the stage. All that is past.'

'Then what shall we talk about?'

'Tell me how you found me out.'

'You look so serious that I shall find it hard to tell you anything. . . . I was singing Schubert's "Ave Maria," and

a man told me he had heard a nun at Wimbledon sing it more beautifully than anyone—myself, of course, excepted. Something told me it was you, and the moment I heard you I knew.'

'I have not sung it for some weeks.'

'It is about three weeks ago, but I was with a friend and could not call that day, and the following day I went to Paris. I have just returned. This is the first free day I had.'

'It is very good of you to come, Louise. I am glad you have not forgotten me.'

'But tell me—I want you to tell me how long this fancy —this whim of yours—is going to last.'

'You surely cannot think that I am not serious. I assure you that living in a convent is no joke at all.'

'Then you are not happy?'

'On the contrary, I am happy, and I grow happier every day. When I said that to live in a convent was not a joke I meant that it would be horrible if one were not sure of one's vocation.'

'But you will tell me, Evelyn, what reason led you here, what impulse.'

'Ah, that is what everyone wants to know. The question you have asked me is the question everyone wishes to put to a nun. I remember longing to ask a Carmelite nun why she had refused the world. She was only eighteen or twenty.'

'And what answer did she give you?'

'I asked her nothing; the reason was plain upon her face. But I will tell you why I came here. I came here in quest of happiness. The same reason that took me to the stage took me here. The happiness I seek is not the happiness I sought in art and lovers. But I came here in quest of happiness.'

'And you have found it?'

'Nuns are far happier than actresses. They seem to me to be perfectly happy, and they have surrendered everything.'

'And are you happy?'

'I am happier than I used to be. But I have not yet taken the vows which separate me irrevocably from the things which make us unhappy; I am not so happy as the

nuns who have been here for twenty years, but I am sure I am happier than you are, Louise.'

'I am not happy at all.'

The conversation paused and then Evelyn said, 'The moment we come to see that life is something more than a set of adventures (that is how I used to look upon my life), the moment we come to see that life has a spiritual meaning, we find ourselves propelled to alter our lives.'

'One can alter one's life without shutting oneself up in a nunnery?'

'We must go where we feel we shall find health. . . . A person suffering from a contagious disease would leave the infected place as soon as he was cured.'

'Perhaps your convalescent might think it his duty to remain to tend the sick.'

'Ah, which is the better, the active or the contemplative order? which is it better, to pray or to act?'

'My dear Evelyn, you were always a little mad. I know all about convents and nuns. I was brought up in a convent, and I, too, was tempted by the religious life, but I did not give way to the temptation. But what are you striving after, Evelyn? You can never know for certain that there is a future life.'

'Even so. It interests me more to pursue a moral idea than to sing difficult music for applause and gain. The inward satisfaction one gets by living for an idea is infinitely greater than one gets by the pursuit of artistic or other pleasure. It is delicious to feel that one is not prompted by selfish motives. I assure you I would sing the ugliest music ever written to get money to pay the convent's debts. To pay off these debts is the object of my life.'

'You think that it is a sufficient object?'

'It is sufficient for me. London had come to seem like a stuffy omnibus. Moreover, I could not breathe in London.'

XXV

The door opened and Mother Hilda came in, and, after a few words, Louise asked if they might go into the garden.

Mother Hilda assented readily, and, as they walked down the terrace, they stopped to listen to the nuns who were singing in the library. Louise spoke of a school, of the advantages of the situation.

'And what an inducement,' she said, 'for mothers to send their children to you. Where could girls learn singing as they could here?'

Mother Hilda did not perceive that Louise's remark was intended to be satirical, and she explained that they could not have a school without altering the rule of the order. Louise regretted that this was so, and spoke of the convent where she had been educated. Mother Hilda knew the convent and several of the nuns, and they were soon talking of their friends, of their tempers, their ailments and their amiabilities. Sister So-and-So was dead, Mother So-and-So was getting very old. Evelyn knew none of them, and her thoughts turned to Louise, and the annoyance this visit caused her seemed out of proportion. She had wished this day to pass in meditation, and her meditations had been interrupted for no good reason, to argue about matters which this day had settled for ever. She did not wish to think unkindly of Louise, but she hoped she would not come to see her again. Visits are only agreeable when they are prompted by the desire for mutual benefit and when they are an exchange of mutual ideas. What benefit had come to her or to Louise by this visit? They had not a thought in common, and once all their thoughts had been common. She had lived with this woman, she had sung with her, they had travelled together, and now Louise was merely a faded recollection, a something that had once been.

By this time Mother Hilda and Louise had exhausted their memories of the French convent, and the conversation had begun to flag, and Evelyn wondered what would happen next. At that moment the porteress appeared —she had come to say that the Prioress would be glad to speak with Mother Hilda. Evelyn and Louise walked on, and they spoke of Mother Hilda, without feeling any interest in what they were saying, until they came to the fish-ponds; then to keep the conversation from

falling Evelyn had to tell Louise how tame the fish were. Louise began to sing the song of the Rhine Maidens. Evelyn joined her for a few bars and then Louise asked her to throw away the ring.'

'What ring, dear?'

'The ring that was put on your finger to-day.'

'No ring was put on my finger. I shall not get the ring till I am professed. That will be in a year from now.'

'Evelyn, let me implore you.'

'But, my dear Louise, if I am happier here than I was in the world I had better remain here.

'The nuns only want your money. When you have given them your money you will be unhappy.'

'These women are my dearest friends. It is painful to me to hear them spoken of in this way.'

A slight mist was rising, a thin moon floated like a pale feather in the sky, and the convent roofs were clear in the luminous air. A nun had come with a message to Evelyn, and she said,—

'Now I must say good-bye.'

'Shall I not see you again, Evelyn? Have we nothing in common any more? Have we faded from each other? I cannot tell you how indescribably sad it seems to me.'

'Only because you put all your faith into the things of this world, which are passing. But I shall pray for you, Louise; I shall always remember you in my prayers.'

'Only in your prayers, Evelyn?'

'My name is no longer Evelyn. I am Sister Teresa.'

XXVI

One day, in the last month of Evelyn's noviceship, Sister Mary John sat at the harmonium, her eyes fixed, following Evelyn's voice like one in a dream. Evelyn was

singing Stradella's 'Chanson d'Eglise,' and when she had finished the nun rose from her seat, and, clasping her friend's hands, she thanked her for her singing with effusion and with tears.

For some time past their eyes lighted up when they met in the passages, and it was delicious to think for a a moment how closely they were dependent upon each other. Once Evelyn had noticed that the Sister seemed to avoid her; it might be only a seeming, she thought, for a few days after Sister Mary John had hurried to meet her. On another occasion she had noticed a flutter as it were in the nun's eyes and a change of colour in her cheeks, and then an appealing look in her eyes, like one whose heart misgives her. Evelyn knew the nature of her own feelings, but she feared that Sister Mary John would one day suspect that hers was neither permissible nor valid; and then, whatever it cost her, she would put it aside; she would not allow anything to come between her and her love of God. Evelyn knew that this nun would not hesitate to leave the convent if she felt her vocation to be endangered by remaining. The possibility of such a leave-taking frightened her, and she resolved she would avoid all casual conversation for the future. But it was difficult to do this; their musical occupation left them constantly together, and Evelyn's coldness increased the nun's desire for her affection.

This friendship, which had begun in the music, caught root in the Latin language, in the Holy Office. It was from Mother Hilda that Evelyn had learnt the groundwork of the Office, but it was from Sister Mary John that she had learned the great place the Office should take in the life of a nun. The nun had caught Evelyn's eyes fixed upon her as she scolded against those who are content with a mere recital of the words and shrink from the labour of learning to appreciate the wonderful appropriateness, acquired not in a single composition, but built up bit by bit in the centuries like some great epic. She had guessed that Evelyn was ready and willing for further instruction.

And they had read the Breviary together, four great volumes, one for every season of the year; the language

was in itself a beguilement, and behind the language there was the rich, mysterious tradition of the Church. Sister Mary John had taught her Latin, and Evelyn had learnt how these books of ritual and observances can satisfy the mind more than any secular literature. There was always something in the Office for them to talk about, something new amid much that remained the same, and the communication of her pleasure at the reappearance of a favourite hymn was always something to look forward to.

In this personal intimacy, so rare in a convent, but which peculiar circumstances had allowed to them, she had become aware of Sister Mary John's extraordinary passion for God. The nun had tried to hide it from her, but she had discovered it, and it was during this time that Evelyn had made her first real advance in piety. It was from the example of Sister Mary John that she had learned how we may think of God even to forgetfulness of our own identity, living while on earth, as it were, in the very atmosphere of His bosom. To watch her friend in prayer was in itself an instigation to prayer; and Sister Mary John had begun to think she had discovered a genius in Evelyn, which, if cultivated, would give a new visionary to the Church. She believed that Evelyn would attain an extraordinary sanctity, that she would acquire marvellous power, and all her prayers were directed to this end. She even neglected the prayers she should say to release her own soul from purgatory, thinking that a few more years would matter little for so great an end. To excite Evelyn's enthusiasm she even did violence to her own humility, speaking of her own visions and ecstasies—poor though they were and inferior to those which would be given to Evelyn if Evelyn would devote herself wholly to God.

Sister Mary John was the only nun in the Wimbledon convent who reminded Evelyn of the nuns she had read of in the lives of the saints. Ecstasies, she felt sure, were not Mother Philippa's religious lot, nor Veronica's. Veronica was far too trim and methodical for a vision. But certain as she was of the somewhat lowly spirituality of the other nuns, she was sure that Sister Mary John succeeded in living beyond herself. That was her own phrase; her admonition was

always that we should strive to live a little beyond ourselves. When the sensible realities faded, she said the Word of God became clearer, and this evacuation of sense had often taken her when she sat alone playing the organ in the church ; and after these transports the return to the physical world was slow and painful.

'I have written down some of my visions in a book ; I have never shown them to anyone, but I will show them to you.'

Beguiled by the immediate moment, and believing it would be to her friend's advantage to read her manuscript, she sought for it among the music, explaining that she had written it as if it were a translation from some mediæval French writer.

'Do not read it now ; take it to the library.'

Evelyn took it to the library at once, and she read how the Sister had been met suddenly in the midst of a great darkness by a shining light which unfolded and revealed to her the Divine Bridegroom, who took her in His arms, saying that He loved her. The anecdote was told so simply that it convinced, and Evelyn paused in her reading to think that whoever attains to any knowledge of the unseen world does so by foregoing some part of her knowledge of the natural world. Whoever prays sees God in a greater or less degree, and visions are but the revelations of the spiritual world about us. 'Yes,' she said, speaking to herself, 'the spiritual world is revealed to us by prayer, just as the material world is discovered to us according to the measure of our senses.'

She read that while looking at a picture of St Francis, whom Christ had taken to His bosom, Sister Mary John had heard a voice saying, 'I will gather thee, oh, my bride, to my bosom in a far warmer embrace, and our communion shall be so perfect that it may not be seen.' Evelyn wondered if the nun had had any scruples regarding her visions, and, turning the pages over, she discovered that once a scruple had entered her heart.

One night she had been awakened, she knew not how or why. It seemed as if she had been awakened to see a soft light shining in the corner of the room, which was quite

dark. She lay with her feet and hands folded, watching the light which grew wider until it descended upon her; and when she awoke again she was lying on her left side, and an angel was beside her. She could just see him in the faint and tremulous light which his flesh emitted, and he folded her in his arms, and his white wings closed about her, and it seemed to her that she had never seen anything so beautiful as his flesh. He folded her closely in his arms, and told her how he loved her, and watched for her, and he held her so closely that the two seemed to become one. Then her flesh became beautiful and luminous like his, and she seemed to have a feeling of love and tenderness for it. She saw his face quite clearly; she seemed to have seen it in some picture. 'But oh, how much more beautiful is the real face,' she thought; and then she hoped he would kiss her; but he did not kiss her, they only seemed to become one—one perfect soul united for ever and ever. He said that she was the counterpart he had been waiting for in heaven, and she fell asleep in his arms—a beautiful sleep, deep and refreshing as the sea, and when she awoke he had left her.

Sister Mary John confessed that she was unable to explain the words, 'I am your counterpart and await you in heaven.' For it was Christ who awaited her in heaven, and for this reason she prayed, if it were God's holy will, that the angel might not visit her again.

The next day at Mass she had feared she would never gather strength to go to the sacred table. But suddenly she had heard a voice saying, 'Come, come, my beloved spouse, I wait for thee; I will descend into thee and take my joy in thee.' Evelyn laid down the book. This passionate materialisation of God's love she felt she could never feel. She did not see the wounds, nor could she count the nails, nor did her soul ever escape into the wound in the side and find a divine beverage in the flowing blood. The Christ to whom her thoughts went out was neither the victim nor the bridegroom, but the young man who had appeared in Galilee, preaching a doctrine which could alone save men from themselves. It was not God, but it was the wonder of the moral law that delighted her,

and her heart remained dry, if it did not rebel against a physical love and perception of God.

She resolved to say very little when she gave back the manuscript; but something had to be said, and Evelyn confessed her opinions. But the Sister did not understand her scruples, and she charged Evelyn's love of God with being cold.

'We are the brides of Christ; Saint Teresa has spoken quite plainly on that point. And St John of the Cross speaks of the union of God in much the same way, and so did all the saints. Oh, Sister, your scruples are morbid; we should surely set no measure to our love of God. There is no lover like God. He is always by you and you can turn to Him at any moment. . . . God wishes us to keep all our love for Him.'

The Sister's innocent candour made her feel ashamed, and she resolved never to suspect Sister Mary's love of God again. She even denied to herself that she had ever suspected it, and accused her sinful imagination. But in the secret life of her soul this intimate and almost sensual love of God continued to perplex her, and while mistrusting it she half desired it, asking herself if faith in God were possible without passionate love. She was aware that her belief in God was more a moral than a sensible conviction. She did not see Christ in the Host as Sister Mary John had done, and she was not certain whether she accepted the Host as an extraordinary symbolic interpretation of God's constant descent into man, of the union of the human and the Divine kind, or as the actual body of the Creator and administrator of things. If her faith on this essential point was not clear, could she live in a convent dedicated to perpetual adoration? She was not quite certain on this point, and while thinking she remembered that no other nun but Sister Mary John was possessed by sufficient faith to allow her to see the Divine flesh in the Host. Evelyn reflected that if she were to leave the convent she might lose her faith. She could conquer her sinful nature only among those whose lives proved to her that they held the world to be worthless. She could live safe from sin only amid a stream of petitions going up daily to God for her

safety. Moreover, her belief in the great sacrament had increased since she had come back from Rome; she desired faith, an ardent, irrevocable, sensible faith, and it would not be withheld from her if she prayed.

By a special dispensation from the Reverend Mother, her watch before the sacrament was increased from half an hour to an hour; she was therefore put on an equality with the choir nuns; and kneeling before the sacrament she thought of God as intimately as she dared, excluding all thought of the young Galilean prophet and seer, allowing herself to think only of the exquisite doctrine. She did not wish Him to take her in His arms until one day starting suddenly from her prayers she asked who it was who stood before her. She seemed to see Him among His disciples, sitting at a small table with a love-light upon His face. She scrutinised the face, fearing it might not be His. She seemed to have seen it. Presently she discovered Ulick; and tremblingly she remembered the night she found him among his disciples. So she did not dare to think of Christ any longer; and with regret and tenderness, and yet with a certain exaltation of the spirit, she turned to the Father, to the original essence which had existed before the world needed a redeemer. She lost herself for a time in the vast spirit which hears the song of Nature through space and the ages. But very soon she turned to the young Galilean prophet again, and His exquisite doctrine seemed to her to be all that man needs to bring to perfect fruition the original germ of immortality implanted in him.

The Prioress divined her trouble, and in consideration of it allowed her to communicate every day, and henceforth He and she were no longer divided. Time passed so quickly in thinking of Him that only a few moments seemed to have divided them, and she awoke at dawn conscious that the hour of the Lord was nigh.

On Sundays the interval with God was longer, for on Sundays the choral Mass was at nine for the convenience of strangers, and the nuns received holy communion at an earlier hour. So there was a long interval in which God brooded in the heart, in which she walked enfolded in the Divine atmosphere. Then the spirit and flesh ceased to battle,

and the flesh received the spirit at every pore. But unhappily this state was forfeit to any slight interruption, and the object of all the nuns was to make it last as long as possible. As sacristan Evelyn was especially liable to interruptions. There were occasions when the server did not attend, and it befell Evelyn to recite the Confetior aloud to the communicants, to make the final responses and to put out the candles when the priest left the altar; and to do these things lost her the joy of her communion. She was dragged out of the unbounded joys and tenderness which had gathered in her heart.

When communion was carried to the sick, to old Mother Lawrence, who could not come down to the chapel at so early an hour, Evelyn and another novice, each with a lighted candle, and Sister Veronica, with a little bell to announce the coming of the Host, preceded the priest through the cloister and up the novitiate stairs to the infirmary. The novices knelt, with their candles in their hands, at the foot of the bed, and the aged nun, wasted with age and abstinences and prayers, waited, tremulous with expectation, her withered hands feebly clasped, for the priest to lay the Host upon her tongue. Once she was very ill indeed; they thought she was dying, yet in her mortal weakness she strove to get on her knees to receive the sacrament, and Veronica, who perceived Sister Lawrence's intention, passed her hands under the armpits, lifting the old nun, but the knees, in which there was no strength, slipped away, only in her eyes was there any life—little spots which awoke out of their dulness at the approach of the sacrament. The gravity of the moment ennobled their different sentiments—Father Daly's faith gross and obtuse, Veronica's faith inherent and unsullied, Evelyn's faith passionate and febrile. The two women were in tears, and their tears only made them more beautiful, and their hearts grew happy and confident as they looked at the old nun now lying peacefully among the pillows, her face calm, seemingly lighted up with a vision. Of what happy eternity, Evelyn thought as they left the bedside, and to the sound of the tinkling bell they passed into the chapel.

Evelyn loved this solemn office; it gave her an intimate sense of personal service on Christ, of walking with Him on earth, and never from repetition did the sight of the nuns prostrated in their stalls as the sacrament was carried back to the altar become trite and formal. This visible manifestation of their undaunted renouncement of the vulgar world exalted her, and new courage came into her heart. She noted the accumulated heads and the joined hands clasped convulsively, with perhaps one face lifted for a moment to gaze on God that went by, eager for some deeper pang of faith, fearful and yet eager to approach God. What are all the manifestations of personal vanity, she thought, whether in art or war or statesmanship, compared with this undaunted self-effacement?

XXVII

She was writing in the library, and Veronica had just opened the door, and though her back was turned to the door she seemed to know it was Veronica. She had seen very little of her lately, and at one time Evelyn, Veronica and Sister Mary John had formed a little group. But since Evelyn had become attached to Sister Mary John, Veronica had withdrawn herself from their friendship, and she now treated them to little disdainful airs, and she did not at once answer Evelyn, who, with the prettiest smile, had asked her whom she had come in search of, and there was an accent of concentrated dislike in her voice when she said she was looking for Sister Mary John.

'I heard her trampling about the passage just now; she is on her way here, no doubt, and won't keep you waiting long.'

Evelyn understood the word 'trampling' as an allusion to the hobnails which Sister Mary John wore in the garden. Veronica had lately been indulging in bitter remarks, but it was not the rudeness of the present remark that startled Evelyn, but Veronica's manner. She did not give Evelyn time to answer her, but left the room instantly, and Evelyn sat nibbling the end of her pen, thinking of what had happened. The little jealousy with which she had credited Veronica did not seem sufficient to account for so much dislike, and she was forced towards the conclusion that Veronica's dislike of Sister Mary John went deeper than she had suspected. She seemed to foresee some unpleasantness, and she sat thinking till the door opened; she hoped it was Veronica, but it was Sister Mary John.

'I can't think what is the matter with Veronica,' she said. 'I passed her in the passage just now, and when I asked her if she had seen you, she said she was really too busy to speak to me, and a moment after she stopped for quite a long while to play with the black kitten which was catching flies in the window.'

Evelyn stood looking at the nun, thinking of Veronica's remarks regarding the hobnails.

'Do you know what it means? Has she ever been rude to you?'

'No, I don't think she has.'

But, in spite of herself, she began awkwardly and hesitatingly to tell of the little passage-of-arms between herself and Veronica. And while laughing at Veronica's jealousy, she stopped suddenly to ask Sister Mary John of what she was thinking.

'She is quite right; it is we who are in the wrong. We have been disobeying the rule this long while.'

Evelyn could not find words to answer her, and an ominous silence was broken by the smiling, ruddy-cheeked porteress.

'Sister Teresa, Monsignor has come, and is waiting to see you in the parlour.'

The colour rose to her cheeks, and so excited was she at the thought of seeing Monsignor that she forgot Veronica's rudeness, and very nearly forgot the rupture her jealousy

might cause in a friendship which had been the principal interest in her life for the last three months; and asking the Sister if she were tidy, she hurried away.

As the door closed Sister Mary John looked round the library, and a little sadness appeared in her face, and many things became clear to her which, until now, she had only half understood. It was Monsignor who had converted Evelyn—Evelyn was therefore attached to him in a special way; but she saw that part of Evelyn's exultation sprang from her instinctive interest in men.

'A man always comes before everyone else, whether she is on the stage or in a convent. So she goes flying to him, her heart in both hands, eager to confide and to trust.'

Sister Mary John walked across the library, cruelly perplexed, for it had suddenly been revealed to her that to bring this friendship to an end she must leave the convent. She must go straight to the Prioress and tell her her life was being absorbed in Evelyn, and beg her to transfer her to the Mother House in France.

Evelyn was now talking to Monsignor in the parlour, and the nun could see him listening, encouraging her to reveal herself by an attentive silence. The Prioress had sent for him, so that he might advise her regarding Evelyn. When the interview was over the Prioress would go to the parlour to hear Monsignor's opinion. So the opportuneness of the moment for her to confide her difficulty to the Prioress was evident to Sister Mary John. The very words she should say rose up in her mind, yet she hesitated, and she stopped in the middle of the room to ask herself why she hesitated. Questions would be intolerable and shameful; but the Prioress would understand, and there would be few questions.

As she turned from the door a voice of extraordinary sweetness began to whisper in her, and she heard that for the sake of retaining Evelyn for a few short years she would lose her through eternity. Were it not better to see her in heaven? And then a strange confusion of thought happened in her. She was tempted by the thought that even in heaven they would be separated by their love of God, and

she remembered with horror that it was since love of Evelyn had begun in her that that passionate love of Christ, which was her vocation, and without which she could not live in a convent, had declined. She must choose between Christ and Evelyn. Well, had not Evelyn chosen Monsignor before her? She was conscious of an exceeding wickedness; her thoughts faded, and she became, as it were, vague pain and irresolution.

But suddenly a great strength was vouchsafed to her, and she went to the Prioress's room.

It was always easy to talk to the Prioress. In their confessions the nuns spoke as if they were thinking aloud, and Sister Mary John explained how this friendship had come to be a disintegrating influence, how her spiritual character had fallen away since Evelyn had become to her a sensible pleasure. She had known this a long while, but had stifled the voice of her conscience. Veronica's jealousy had brought her, as it were, to bay, and in a flash she had realised how deeply she was involved in the entanglement of her senses. Speaking quickly, she said that Evelyn had absorbed her life, that she lived immersed in her as she should live immersed in God.

'My dear child, you exaggerate unconsciously, for enough power remains in you to break silence and to put the matter into my hands.'

'I could do nothing else; I had to come to tell you, Mother. The truth is I am losing my vocation, and to regain it I must leave. Dear Mother, I have come to ask you to transfer me to our house in France.'

A shadow flitted across the Prioress's face, and the nun anticipated a refusal.

'I am thinking, my dear child, of what is best to be done.' And while the Prioress thought of the best way out of the dilemma, the nun regretted the trouble she was giving this old woman. There was a swish of wind and rain on the window, and the trees waved disconsolately in the wet air, and their waving carried her thoughts out to sea, where there were sails and rigging, and she saw herself on her way to France. France was to be the end of her life, and she was thinking of the end of her days in the

Mother House at Lyons, where she knew no one, when the Prioress said, 'Mrs Cater is going to France next month. You can travel with her.'

'So a month must pass. I had thought of leaving to-day or to-morrow, but I see that that is impossible. A month —how shall I endure it?'

'No one will know,' the Prioress answered, with a little vehemence; 'it is a secret between us, and I forbid you to tell anyone the reason of your leaving.'

'May I not tell Teresa?'

'Teresa will be professed in the next few weeks, I hope, perhaps next week; she has reached a critical moment of her life, and her mind must not be disturbed. The raising of such a question at such a moment might be fatal to her vocation.'

The Prioress rose from her chair, and following Sister Mary John to the door, impressed upon her again that it was essential that no one should ever know why she had left the convent.

'You may tell Teresa before you leave; but she must hear nothing of it till the moment of your leaving. I give you permission merely to say good-bye to her on the day you leave, and in the interval you will see as little of each other as possible.'

But when Sister Mary John said that Sister Elizabeth could accompany Evelyn as well as she could, the Prioress interrupted her. 'You must always accompany her when she sings at Benediction. You must do nothing to let her suspect that you are leaving the convent on her account.'

And at that moment the Prioress remembered that Evelyn was talking with Monsignor.

'She thinks him a Bossuet,' the Prioress said to herself, as she returned to her chair; 'they have corresponded for months on literary questions.' She hoped Evelyn would not be effusive in her admiration, and so convey a false impression of herself, and then a little smile hovered round the corners of her mouth, a sign of the thought that had passed. She began to arrange her papers, and as she did so Evelyn asked the prelate to tell her about Rome.

The last time she had seen him was in the early

summer, soon after her clothing, and she had hardly been able to speak to him. She had not recovered from the shock of her father's death ; and he recalled all the circumstances of it so vividly, the very moment when he had led her from the room.

Her father's death was almost as much before her now as then, but differently. Her grief had gone, as it were, out of flesh, and was reflected now merely in her imagination. It looked at her out of the sky like a star, the sign whereby the wayfarer directs his steps. The old poignant grief which the sight of Monsignor had reawakened in her only endured for a moment ; she had recovered herself, and was asking him to tell her about Rome and its ecclesiastics. She thought of them because of her father's relations with them ; she talked gaily and eagerly ; and yet she had, perhaps, never felt so clearly, nor had the feeling ever been so conclusive, that the personal life was dead in her, that she now lived for the nuns, in order to help them out of their difficulties ; and that when that was done her mission would be accomplished.

All her surface characteristics remained, but in her deeper self had been changed. It seemed to her that she had been lifted out of animal life, to some extent, and had been carried forward, if not into, at least towards the life of the soul. She felt this very clearly now, and yet she wished to hear of the little externalities of religion to which pious women devote so much time.

She reminded him of things which he had almost forgotten, and he was surprised that she wished to hear the end of the disputation in which he had been engaged with a certain cardinal, who had taken a reactionary view regarding the value of the Biblical account of the Creation. She reminded him of the arguments he had used, but he had forgotten them, and she recalled his very words. He had said that the cardinal had committed the Church as far as he could commit the Church to certain opinions which might afterwards have to be reconsidered. Monsignor had said that religion had nothing to fear from science. Science is exclusively concerned with man's physical surroundings ; religion is, with equal exclusive-

ness, concerned with the development of his moral consciousness. She said that this way of putting the question had struck her at the time; and his face lighted up, and he expressed surprise at her memory of his opponents and the details of the disputation.

'Ah, you don't know what it is to be shut up for more than a year with a lot of women in a convent.'

'But I came here to talk to you about your vocation, to discover whether you are called to separate yourself from all worldly interests.'

'I have made up my mind to be a nun, but now you are here I want to talk about Rome and of its people.'

She had kept all his letters, and knowing his bent for theological discussion she had allowed certain little heresies to creep into her letters, in order that he might disprove them to her admiration. He had replied at length, and his letters were the letters of a man of liberal intelligence, pragmatical and astute. But these letters coming into the conventual monotony had seemed like great manifestations of a great central mind, and she insisted that the book he was writing would give new impetus to Catholic life. She exhorted him to take the lead, to assert himself, for without him Catholic ideas could make no further progress in England. She deplored that he had not been made a cardinal and with an enthusiasm that impressed him.

Taking advantage of a pause in the conversation he mentioned that the writing of the last portion of his book had been delayed, but he hoped to find time to finish it this winter. Then he asked her, somewhat abruptly, if certain scruples regarding the Holy Communion had passed. She answered that they had passed, and the conversation came to an awkward pause.

'You have come here,' she said, 'to talk to me about myself, whereas I want to talk to you about you; it will interest me so much more. You want to find out if I have a vocation, but the more I tell you about myself the less you will believe in my vocation.'

The prelate persisted, and after some hesitation she said,—

'My duty was to go to Rome with my father, but I could not bring myself to accept that duty, so great was the temptation to separate myself from the world. For this wrongdoing I was punished; my father died, perhaps through my fault. His death however wrought a great change in me, a change which had been preparing a long while back. I felt clearly, what I had always felt indistinctly, that there is no value in human life at all except in so much as it enables us to develop our spiritual life. You remember that I wrote to you about a man not being given a soul, but a germ which might become a soul if he cultivated it. It now seems to me that that belief in the mortality and the immortality of the soul is what is most natural and inherent in me. It is the original seed of my nature, but it was buried very deep, and it took a long time to grow out of the ground. Now I have told you all I know of myself, Monsignor, all that I have learned in the long year of my novitiate. I have told you the whole truth so far as I have gone.'

'And you have determined to take the veil? Tell me, you do not find this rule difficult and arduous?'

So long as we live with those whose ideas correspond with ours, the rest matters very little.'

'Remember that the step is extremely grave. Nothing could be more unfortunate than that you should take vows merely because you are friends with these nuns and wish to relieve them from their pecuniary embarrassments.'

'You are very sceptical, Monsignor. What can I say to convince you? That I do not like the rule, that I find it very difficult?'

She laughed and pressed him to admit that that was what he was minded to say. And he admitted if she had said she found the rule difficult he would have found it easier to believe in her vocation.

'Ah, my past life—you cannot forget it; you are like the others,' and she reminded him that the Prioress herself had not refused the world, like Veronica, but had renounced the world, like herself.

'Yet she is our Reverend Mother. Who knows, Monsignor—I succeeded on the stage, why should not I

succeed equally well in the convent? Promise me this, that if the nuns vote for me, you will profess me, and that if one day I should be Prioress you will write and advise me on doctrine and on the daily life of my convent.'

He could not refuse to promise what she had asked, and they laughed and stood looking at each other until a bell rang.

'Now I must go to the sacristy.'

As she went there she met Sister Mary John, and she said,—

'I think I have convinced Monsignor, and he has promised to profess me.'

'Then it is settled?'

'Yes; but why do you look so strange? Do you think the nuns will not vote for me?'

The nun stood looking at Evelyn, conscious that the entanglement was even more intricate than she had imagined. If Evelyn were not elected she might leave the convent and return to the stage. She was one who would travel a certain distance with admirable perseverance, surmounting every obstacle, until one, very likely a smaller obstacle than those she had already passed, opposed her, then without any very clear reason she might quickly return the way she had come. 'Should Evelyn leave,' Sister Mary John thought, 'I may stay. Nothing is decided, except that we are to be separated.' The nun asked herself if she were deceiving Evelyn by withholding her intention to leave the convent as soon after Evelyn's profession as possible, and the question whether she should vote for her, or abstain from voting, or vote against her, perplexed her. What matter, she thought, since in any case we are to be separated.

'But what is the matter, Sister? Why do you stand looking at me like this?'

The nun could not answer, and Evelyn was about to hold out her arms to her, thinking she was going to fall. At that moment the Prioress called. The Prioress was on her way to the parlour, and divining the difficulty that had arisen, she sent Sister Mary John with a message to Mother Philippa. Her hand was on the door handle, and she entered the parlour as soon as the nun was out of sight.

'I hope you are pleased, Monsignor, with the excellent condition of mind in which you have found our dear Sister Teresa? She told me she intended to ask you to profess her. I am sure it would be of great assistance to her if you would.'

'Sister Teresa and I have had a long talk, and I find her very earnest. I think I may say that I found her very much improved. She seems to have read and thought a great deal since I last saw her.'

'Yes, Sister Teresa reads a great deal; theological questions present a great attraction to her mind.'

Monsignor did not answer, and he left the Reverend Mother to continue the conversation. She did this with alacrity, and they talked round the subject. At last there seemed to be nothing more to say, and the Prioress found herself obliged to ask him if he thought Sister Teresa had a vocation.

'I find her, as I have said, my dear Reverend Mother, extremely earnest; she has evidently thought a great deal on spiritual matters. But she has only just fulfilled the required time in the novitiate; are you sure she has acquired that solid piety so necessary for a religious life? She is very emotional. What I mean is, should you say that her attitude towards the life was normal?'

'Sister Teresa,' the old nun replied, 'will never be normal, but her genius has enabled her to assimilate our rule.'

In reply to further questions, he said that he had only seen Sister Teresa once in the last six months. Besides, no one was so capable of deciding on a nun's vocation as the Prioress herself, and he begged her not to be influenced by anything that he had said.

'When the question is decided, let me know, for I have promised Sister Teresa I will profess her myself.'

The Prioress looked at him sharply, and as she went to her room she thought of what might have happened if she had been refused election, and she thought of the grave responsibility which she and the other Mothers would incur by refusing to vote for Evelyn.

XXVIII

It was with this argument that she sought to overcome Mother Mary Hilda when the Mothers met in council. Their council was held in the Mother's own room after evening prayers, when no light burned anywhere, and the nuns and the canaries were asleep in their cells and cages. The Prioress began by saying that she had consulted Monsignor, and that he had said nothing would give him greater pleasure than to see Sister Teresa professed, but he left the ultimate decision entirely to them.

Mother Mary Hilda held the opinion of Monsignor in high esteem, but she did not withdraw her opposition, and she questioned the Prioress closely as to Monsignor's precise words, and was manifestly relieved to hear that he thought on the subject of a nun's vocation the nuns were the best judges. So she gained an advantage over the Prioress, but it was only momentary, for when she spoke of the shortness of Evelyn's postulancy, laying stress on the fact that it had been broken by her journey to Rome, the Prioress said,—

'But all that has been decided by the Bishop; we need not go into that again. No one has so much right to form an opinion of Evelyn's vocation as you have, but I cannot forget that from the first your instinct was against her, and when that is so we are never convinced, I am afraid.'

'But, Mother, I am sorry if I seem to you stubborn.'

'Not stubborn, but I would hear you explain your reasons for thinking Sister Teresa has not a vocation, and Mother Philippa is most anxious to hear them too.'

Mother Philippa listened, thinking of her bed, and wondering why Mother Mary Hilda kept them up by refusing to agree with the Prioress.

Mother Hilda, with quiet obstinacy and determination, reminded them that they could hardly point to a case in which a novice had been elected who had been with them for so short a time as Sister Teresa.

'But we have known Teresa for a long time—for more than three years. Her thoughts have been inclining to-

wards a religious life ever since we have known her. You do not deny her piety. Her religious fervour gives promise of the highest sanctity in the future; she is animated with the sincerest love of God.'

'I have no doubt whatever on that point, nevertheless I find it difficult to believe that she will prove a satisfactory member of the community. She is quite different from any of us.'

'I have heard that phrase very often, and confess it conveys no idea to my mind. We are all different from one another. Peter was not like Paul, nor was Catherine of Siena like Saint Teresa. We are anxious to know, Mother Hilda, what is your precise reason for thinking that Sister Teresa has not a vocation.'

'You have set me a difficult task, Mother. It seems to me that her piety, although very genuine, does not penetrate much below the surface. A good deal of it seems to me incidental, and to be brought about by the great grief which she experienced at her father's death. I have noticed this too, that her piety does not stimulate others to piety but rather the reverse. Since she has been in the convent you will not deny that she has been a source of distraction to us all. We are always thinking of her, and talking of her when we can. Inquiries are always on foot concerning her. She is the one that all the visitors want to see. Our visitors are excellent people, no doubt; but they spend a great deal of time in the parlour, and they have to be waited on there, and the teas do not end till nearly six o'clock. Now comes another matter on which I would not speak if speech could be avoided. It is a matter so delicate that I fear, whatever words I use, my words will misinterpret my meaning—what I want to say is that Teresa influences us all. I would remind you that Sister Mary John and Veronica are absorbed in her influence, though I am sure they are not aware of it. But it would seem to me impossible not to notice it. Have you ever noticed it?' Mother Hilda said, appealing directly to the Prioress and Mother Philippa. Mother Philippa shook her head, and then confessed she had not the slightest notion of what Mother Mary Hilda meant.

The Prioress asked if she thought Sister Teresa had shown any undue vanity in the attentions which were paid to her.

'No, indeed; her humility is so striking that very often I feel that I may after all be misjudging her.'

'I confess I completely fail,' said Mother Philippa, 'to understand your objections to our visitors; without them we cannot live. They are our means of subsistence, and it was in the hope of attracting visitors . . .'

'I know, I know.'

And Mother Hilda said she was quite willing to refrain from voting, but this was not what the Prioress wished. Every nun must accept the responsibility. 'And it would seem,' she said, 'though I do not feel it myself, that very great responsibility attaches to Sister Teresa's election.'

'Dear Reverend Mother, I can only repeat that I think we should wait. Another year in the novitiate, perhaps six months, will prove whether her desire is a passing desire or a true vocation.'

'But our necessities!'

'Ah, Reverend Mother, our necessities should not influence us, surely.'

'Our necessities should not influence us either way. But they seem to influence you against her. Don't they?'

'Yes, I admit that they do.'

'Then, if you feel like that,' said Mother Philippa, waking from a light doze which had not prevented her from hearing the conversation, 'I think that you should abstain from voting.'

Instead of answering, Mother Hilda asked the Prioress for her reason for objecting to a slight delay.

'If we accept Evelyn her salvation will be secured, and if we yield to your scruples we make ourselves responsible for all that may happen to her. I ask if you are prepared to see this house and garden confiscated. Although our order is very poor, some of us may find refuge in another convent. But many of us, the younger ones, would have to return to their homes, and there are our poor lay Sisters; what will become of them?'

'Our circumstances are very trying, I know, but I do not think we should allow them to influence us.'

'But you have said,' rejoined the Prioress, 'that they do influence you against Teresa, whereas Mother Philippa and I can truthfully say that they do not influence us in her favour.'

On that the Prioress rose to her feet, and the other two nuns understood that the interview was at an end.

'Dear Reverend Mother, I know how great your difficulties are,' said Mother Hilda, 'and I am loth to oppose your wishes in anything. I know how wise you are—how much wiser than we—but however foolishly I may appear to be acting, you will understand that I cannot act differently, feeling as I do.'

'I understand that, Mother Hilda. We must act according to our lights. And now we must go to bed; we are breaking all the rules of the house.'

XXIX

THE Prioress had wished Sister Mary John to leave Evelyn in doubt that any change had come into their friendship, but no one can act a part when their deepest feelings are engaged, and Sister Mary John had hurried past Evelyn when they met, and during the week Evelyn noticed that Sister Mary John had not spoken to her once except to ask her what she was going to sing. At any other time Evelyn would have been seriously troubled by this break in their friendship, but she was thinking now of her vows and of her election, and she dismissed all other matters from her thoughts, only allowing herself to hope that this estrangement was temporary, that when she was elected a choir Sister she and Sister Mary John would be friends as they had always been.

And when Sister Mary John looked across the chapel

and saw Evelyn absorbed in prayer, she was certain that her love had not been a temptation to Evelyn, and it was a bitter gladness to see that separation from her caused Evelyn no pain.

And listening to the beautiful voice she thought of the Prioress's great age, and of how friendless Evelyn would be when she was dead. She remembered that the nuns were jealous of Evelyn's voice, and that they resented the attention that always hummed round Evelyn in the parlour. She foresaw nothing but unhappiness for Evelyn ; she had begun to doubt whether she had any true vocation, and she could not help feeling that the best thing that could happen would be for Mother Hilda's opposition to succeed.

But Mother Hilda's opposition was overruled, Evelyn was elected almost unanimously, and Monsignor was coming to put the ring on her finger. In a week she would be plighted to Christ, a most desirable and beautiful bride, Sister Mary John thought. It seemed as if her heart were about to break, and she longed to run away to her cell, for it seemed impossible to restrain her tears. What account could she give of herself to the other nuns, and the Prioress would know why she was weeping. It seemed impossible to stifle her weary heart any longer; nothing would relieve her except to tell the entire community of her miserable condition, but she had promised the Prioress not to speak to Evelyn of her decision to leave the convent until Evelyn had made her vows. Now this promise seemed to her most horrible and wicked, and to break it seemed to be her duty. There is a vocation which admits of no doubt whatever, and there is a vocation which is dependent on certain circumstances ; and how did she know that Evelyn's vocation was not dependent upon the support of her friendship in this convent ? how did she know that Evelyn would take the final vows if she knew how friendless she would be when her friend was away in France, and when the Prioress was dead ?

She knew none of these things, but she had made a terrible promise, and all the week she lived in the terrors of nightmare. And on the day of Evelyn's profession, when she saw her walk between the Prioress and Mother Hilda in

her habit and white veil, it seemed to the broken-hearted nun that she could contain herself no longer, and that she must get up from her place and make a public declaration. Even in this last moment it were better to make it than to keep silence; yet she remained kneeling, watching this ceremony. But there is a limit to suffering. She seemed to forget everything, and awaking from a melancholy trance she listened to Monsignor, who was asking Evelyn what she had come to ask from the Church. She heard her reply that she sought to enter the religious life.

Then Monsignor began his address, and Sister Teresa stood listening to the exhortation, confident in herself while she heard the priest speak of the difficulties and the crosses of the religious life. She was asked again if she were prepared to embrace it, and to all questions she answered 'Yes,' and she looked so joyful that Sister Mary John felt that Evelyn was following her true vocation. She said to herself, 'When one is certain of one's self nothing matters; Evelyn will be happy in the convent even when the Prioress was dead.' Then she saw the tall figure cross to the gospel side of the altar with the two nuns; she saw her sign her name to the vows she had made, and when she came back Sister Mary John saw Monsignor put the ring on her finger. Evelyn knelt at the feet of the Prioress, who gave her the black veil, and all the nuns sang the 'Veni spousa Christi.'

And the few people in the church who had witnessed the ceremony felt as Evelyn had felt when she saw the Birmingham girl leave the vanity of the world for the true realities of prayer. Within the cloister the nuns gathered round Evelyn to congratulate her, and their congratulations seemed to her more valid than those which she used to receive for her singing 'Elsa's Dream.' But as they pressed round her she noticed that Sister Mary John was striving to absent herself, and breaking from them she called to her,—

'How is this, Sister? I do not hear you say anything; and why would you go away yourself?'

'I am glad, Teresa, indeed I am glad,' and she added under her breath, 'More glad than I expected to be.'

'Did you doubt my vocation, then?'

Sister Mary John strove to disengage her hands, which Evelyn held, and the other nuns had begun to wonder; in another moment they would have begun to surmise that something was wrong, but the Prioress intervened and took Evelyn into the garden and told her that her dearest wishes had been realised.

'I am glad, too, dear Mother; and you are accountable for a great deal of what has happened; for I doubt if I should ever have had the strength without you. But, dear Mother, tell me what has happened to Sister Mary John? Did you notice that she was the only one who did not come to congratulate me? For some time I have noticed that she avoids me in a way she never did before.'

'It was necessary, Teresa, for you and Sister Mary John to see a great deal of each other, but a nun must always remember that she belongs wholly to God.'

'Dear Mother, it was Sister Mary John's example that brought me to God. She has been almost as great a help to me as you, and this estrangement has spoilt the pleasure of the day for me.'

'You will remember what I say, Teresa: a nun belongs wholly to God, and you must not try to force upon Sister Mary John a friendship which she does not wish.'

The Prioress's voice had suddenly become cold; almost cruel. Evelyn's heart misgave her. She felt that something had happened—something terrible, and she lay awake thinking of it. Her thoughts roved about the truth, not daring to approach it, whereas Sister Mary John knew it and she foresaw that Evelyn would question her. Her unhappiness was so great that her exile seemed to her less than the explanation that awaited her on the morning of her departure. Every day was a great labour, but the morning was now at hand, for the lady with whom Sister Mary John was to travel had written to the Prioress saying that her departure had been unexpectedly hastened. She hoped that it would suit dear Sister Mary John's convenience equally well to travel this week as the following week. Sister Mary John looked upon this shortening of her torment as providential, for yesterday Evelyn had stopped her and begged her to explain why she no longer spoke to her. Evelyn had written

an impassioned letter, and Sister Mary John had begun to feel that she could not bear the strain any longer.

Next morning she opened the library door, and Evelyn's eyes lighted up, thinking they were about to be reconciled; but the light died out of them instantly, for Sister Mary John wore a long black cloak over her habit, and she had a bird cage in her hand, and Evelyn saw the sly jackdaw with his head on one side looking at her.

'I have come to say good-bye to you, Teresa; I am going away.'

'Now I understand why you have not spoken to me for so long. This is the reason of the change. Now I understand it all, and you are taking your jackdaw with you.'

'Yes; I was afraid he might pine and die, and dear Mother said I might take him with me.'

Evelyn asked her about the journey, for she did not dare to ask her if she had told the Prioress the reason why she wanted to leave. She did not like to ask her if she had consulted the other nuns or Father Daly, and they wasted a good deal of this last time together talking of indifferent things. But when Sister Mary John took up the cage, she cried,—

'For how long?'

'For always.'

'Oh, Sister, you must hear me before you go! You know how fond I have been of you. I shall not be able to live in the convent without you. I have no scruples whatever; so why should you have scruples regarding your affection for me?'

'Each one, dear Teresa, is guardian to her own soul, and if I feel I am losing my soul by remaining I must go.'

'But, Sister dear, you brought me nearer to God. Had it not been for you, I might never have had the courage to take the final vows.'

'I am glad if, through me, you learnt to love God better. That is so much to the good.'

'I thought this estrangement was only temporary. I am distracted. I cannot think of what I want to say to you; but when you are gone I shall remember, and ask myself why I did not say this to her and that to her. One

moment. Tell me—it is only fair that you should tell me —how our love of each other has altered our love of God.'

'I can never tell you, Teresa. I can only say I understand—perhaps as I never did before—that nothing must come between the soul and God, and that there is no room for other love in our hearts. We must remember always that we are the brides of Christ—you and I, Sister—and I am leaving you that we may both give our love more wholly to our crucified Lord.'

They stood holding each other's hands, and some of Sister Mary John's spiritual exaltation passed into Evelyn, and she began to feel that this parting was inevitable.

'Won't you kiss me before you go?

'Please let me go. It will be better not. The carriage is waiting, I must go.'

She went to the carriage that was waiting for her in the lane, and Evelyn took up her pen as if she were going to continue her writing, but she put it down, and she walked up the room like one dazed. If anyone had spoken to her she would not have been able to answer reasonably, and she was staring blankly out of the window when the Prioress entered the library.

'Mother, what does all this mean? Why did you let her go?'

The Prioress sat down slowly, and looked at Evelyn without speaking.

'Mother, you might have let her stay for my sake.'

'I allowed her to see you before she left, and that was the most I could do in the circumstances.'

Evelyn stared out of the window, and the old nun sat still in the armchair.

The terrace, and the trees at the end of St Peter's Walk, and the grass plots and the flower beds seemed to mock her, and in a flutter of terror she thought of the pain of intermittent memories, for the grief she suffered now would multiply in her heart.

'Mother, you might have advised her to wait, for I believe she acted on mere scruples.'

'She felt that by staying here she was imperilling her vocation and yours, and it was not, I assure you, without

due reflection that she decided she must go. I insisted on her waiting to see if she would think differently.'

The words suggested to Evelyn that this leave-taking had been held over until she had taken the final vows, and she said that she should have been told of this before. But the Reverend Mother could not allow a nun's mind to be troubled during the time of preparation for her vows ; it had to be held over. Evelyn did not answer. It was terrifying to remember that no one had ever believed in her vocation except the Prioress. Mother Hilda had not believed ; Monsignor had had doubts. So much had depended on her joining the community ; she had wished to help them, and it did not seem possible in any other way.

'Do you still believe in my vocation, Mother ?'

'Yes, Teresa, I feel quite certain. Put all such doubts away from you.'

'Ah, if I could. My vocation has been so different from anyone else's.'

'Don't think I blame either you or Sister Mary John for what has occurred. I only blame myself. I ought to have foreseen it. It all comes from having exempted you from the rules on account of the music ; no one deplores infraction of the rules more than I do ; it never answers, only in this case there seemed to be no alternative.'

'It was necessary to me to become a nun, so the rule was broken. What is it that guides these things ? It is not we. . . . It is God ; Providence is behind it all. I can see the hand of Providence in it all as I look back. But Sister Mary John might have stayed. I feel sure that this is a mistake ; her scruples were imaginary, and her going has done nothing except to trouble my peace of mind. And what will the Sisters think of it ? Are they to know that it was because of me ?'

'The Sisters will never know,' the Prioress answered with a little vehemence. 'It is a secret between you and me and Sister Mary John. I forbid you ever to tell anyone the reason for her going. Teresa, I know this is a heavy trial for you, and I am ready to do all in my power to turn it to good account. Dear Teresa,' and the old nun took her hand, 'our greatest happiness comes

when we have put away every worldly recollection; it is often very hard to do this, but when we have made the sacrifice we are glad of it. I had a photograph of one who was very dear to me once, and it was a long while before I could bring myself to destroy it; but when I burnt it I was glad. We must try to understand that the things of this world are nothing; that this world is passing always like water and that our lives pass with it. Your grief will fade as all the things of this world fade. There is only one thing that does not fade, love of God. We are happy in it, and we are always unhappy outside it. Doing His work is the only happiness. You have discovered it yourself; it was that that brought you here.'

'Oh, Mother, all you say is right; but life is difficult, at this moment it is inexplicably so. It was she who taught me to love God, and now she leaves me for God's sake. If I should love Him less now that she has gone, what a misfortune that would be. Then I should have lost all.' And turning suddenly to the Reverend Mother, Evelyn said, 'But she need not have gone, Mother. Why did you not make her stay? Hers was only a scruple; she fancied she was giving to me what belonged to God. But God had all of her: I know better than anyone how entirely He possessed her.'

'Believe me, Teresa, there was no choice for her but to go. She confided in me, and I could not bring myself to say she was not to go; you only look at it from your point of view. For you there was no danger in this friendship, for you are different women—your lives have been so different.'

'I wonder, Mother, if you know how miserable I am? Before my profession I was sure of myself, or nearly, and I thought my vocation quite sure. But for this last two weeks I have been despondent and doubtful, so this comes as a greater shock now than at any other time.'

'The clothing brings great relief, and everyone is happy after her clothing; but I think everyone is despondent and doubtful after the final vows. You see profession brings such a change into a nun's life. During her noviceship she is as a child; there is always the Novice Mistress to

run to when she is uncertain or despondent. She will find help and cheerfulness in her. When the final vow releases her from the novitiate, all these supports are taken away from her. For the first time she has to rely upon herself, to judge for herself—I have never known it otherwise. You may be sure, Teresa, that you will be quite contented and happy in a few months.'

'It seems impossible, Mother.'

'When we are despondent happiness seems as if it would never come again, and when we are happy our happiness seems inherent in ourselves, and we do not believe that it can ever pass from us.'

XXX

All sorts of reasons were given for Sister Mary John's departure; the nuns chattered like moon-awakened birds, and then the convent fell back into silence.

As the year closed, the old Prioress began to think that the incident was dead and that no consequences would be begotten. But the friendship of the two nuns remained unconsciously associated in everyone's mind with the sudden departure of one of them from the convent; and behind these ideas there lay a half-reticulated background of suspicion regarding Evelyn. Without knowing why, the convent had begun to resent its dependency upon her singing. In the beginning of the following year Sister Winifred, who had done a set of caricatures of the lay Sisters cooking under difficulties, when the pipes were frozen and there was no water in the kitchen, conceived the idea that she might contribute to the general purse by selling her sketches in the parlour. They had amused the visitors, and encouraged by the sale of a copy of the convent Murillo, she had applied herself to a set of altar pieces. One of

these had been bought by the lady who had given her the paints. Sister Winifred had been given a painting room; it had become the fashion to visit it, and the departure of the visitors, whom it was already difficult to induce to leave the convent after Benediction, was still further delayed. Sister Winifred had become a considerable person in the convent, and the fact that the Prioress did not admire her painting did not discourage Sister Winifred. She had answered, 'Dear Mother, you can only admire Evelyn's singing.'

A few months later Sister Agatha discovered an unsuspected talent in herself. She did not make it known to the Prioress until she had accumulated a large heap of manuscript on the life of her favourite saint, and her proposal was that the proceeds of the work should be devoted to paying off the convent debts. Another nun knew French, and a second remembered that she knew German. Then someone spoke of a school, and the idea seemed to them the very happiest; a school would give them all an opportunity of doing something for the convent, and the conversion of Wimbledon to Rome became a subject of conversation. Sister Winifred's pictures and Sister Agatha's manuscripts had never been taken very seriously; they had merely served as a pretext for the Sisters to discuss what was in their minds. But the idea of a school seemed to formulate many aspirations; it seemed like the solution of all their difficulties, and at every recreation groups of nuns collected to discuss the financial possibilities of the project, and to tell each other of the visitors who offered to send their daughters to them.

'They all seem to forget,' the Prioress said to Mother Hilda, as she passed down St Peter's Walk, 'that to start a school would mean to alter the rule of our order.'

'You know that I do not approve, dear Mother, but what they say is that since the contemplative side of our house has been so largely infringed upon it might be well to go a little further and undertake a school.'

The Prioress winced a little; she knew Mother Hilda held her to be personally responsible for the change. For, according to Mother Hilda, the change was inherent in

Evelyn's election, which the Prioress had directly forced upon the convent. Mother Hilda would go further back still. The Prioress knew she would trace the origin of the disaster to the admission of Evelyn into the convent.

Nothing more was said at the time, but a few days later the matter came up for general discussion in chapter, and the Prioress pointed out that the teaching of music and painting, and French and German, was contrary to the rule, and could never be lawfully undertaken, that if teaching were undertaken without the express permission of the Mother General it would mean cutting themselves off from the Mother House in France. It would mean practically the establishment of a new foundation, which would be classed among the active rather than the contemplative orders.

The dissidents had Mother Philippa on their side, and the Prioress's argument regarding the new foundation did not frighten them. They admitted that the Passionist Sisters had never kept a school before, but they said there was nothing in their rule to prevent them from doing so. Sister Winifred held that the Prioress's faith in their work as contemplative nuns amounted to fanaticism, and that she clung to the letter of the rule with mistaken rigidity—the rule was made for them, and not they for the rule, etc. During the next recreation fresh arguments were discovered in favour of the relaxation of the rule. It was pointed out that many of the enclosed orders had schools and lived by teaching, that to refuse the advantages which a rich suburb like Wimbledon held out to them was narrow-minded; and the Prioress was held up as the type of a mediæval Catholic. It was said that an appeal to the Bishop must end by a decision in their favour, for the whole tendency of modern Catholicism was to look more favourably on the active than on the contemplative orders. The prospect of Wimbledon's conversion would win the Bishop to their side, and Sister Winifred spoke of the high place their community would take in the annals of the Church. She obtained the unqualified approval of some, but there were two Sisters who inclined towards a poultry farm. The little orchard at the end of the garden could

be turned into an excellent chicken run, and they had calculated that three hundred hens would pay the convent debts in less than three years. After some discussion it was discovered that the poultry farm and the school did not conflict, so the poultry farmers and the educationalists made common cause against the contemplatives, and at the end of the month the two factions sat on different sides of the garden, congratulating themselves on their admirable self-control in refraining from speech.

Schism provokes schism, and the patient lay Sisters grew discontented with their lot. One day Sister Agnes was heard saying that her idea of an order was 'the Little Sisters of the Poor'; and a few days after she told a group of choir Sisters, as she passed up the garden, that they were merely fashionable ladies, mostly converts. In extenuation of Sister Agnes's rudeness a nun mentioned that she was merely a lay Sister, and another mentioned that the chaplain held very strong views about the active order. He was a favourite with the lay Sisters—he was of their class and shared their ideas.

Evelyn felt that she could not take sides, and these dissensions filled her with misgivings, for was she not the cause of them? There had been none till she came, and she wondered if she would always be a discord and what change would have to happen in her to bring her into the common order. She had been the cause of confusion before, and apparently worse confusion was about to follow. She had come to the convent because the world was lonely, and in this convent they had lived enfolded in an exquisite spiritual atmosphere. Each one knew the other, though the other spoke very little; the convent was a spiritual camp; and the prayers of each one were a contribution to the common weal. It was from this intimacy of thought and endeavour that they derived their happiness. But they had fallen from their high estate, they had grasped at the things of this world, they had conspired like the angels.

It had seemed to the sub-Prioress that she could manage a school. Her capacity for business had attracted all the business of the convent to her, but it had not been

enough to satisfy her energy, and Sister Winifred tempted her alternately with a school and a laundry, and whenever she came to her cell to consult her regarding some business detail, they indulged in a little chaff; the temptation to talk about the Prioress was irresistible.

'We all admire the Prioress,' said Sister Winifred; 'no one understands her merits better than I; it is indeed a pity she should be so narrow-minded upon one point. Don't you think you could influence her?'

'I have known her these many years, she is an admirable woman in many ways. I doubt, however, we shall never induce her to agree to any relaxation of the rule.'

Then Sister Winifred spoke of the Prioress's influence with Father Ambrose and the bishop, but she did not tell her hopes of throwing Father Daly into the opposite scale. She took no one into her confidence and waited her opportunity; and thinking over the arguments she would use, she remembered with a little thrill of delight how bitterly he resented the usurping Prioress, who had reduced his spiritual administration to the mere act of absolution. This was clearly the point of attack, and seeing him a few days after, pacing the garden alley reading his breviary, she went tripping down the pathway, asking in a little insidious tone, which at once caught his attention, if she could consult him on a matter of importance.

She was a tall, thin woman, with a narrow forehead, a long, thin nose and prominent teeth, extremely plain at first sight, but at second sight her quick brown eyes revealed an eager and alert mind. And she began by telling him that she had chosen this opportunity to speak to him because she did not dare to do so in the confessional.

'It would take too much time.' And there was a little kindly malice in her brown eyes as she said, 'You know how strict the Prioress is that we should not exceed our regulation three minutes.'

'I know that quite well,' the little man answered abruptly, 'a most improper rule; but, however, we will not discuss the Prioress, dear Sister Winifred; what have you come to tell me?'

'Well, in a way, it is about the Prioress. You know

all about our financial difficulties, and you know that they are not settled yet.'

'I thought that Sister Teresa's singing—'

'Of course Sister Teresa's singing has done us a great deal of good, but the collections have fallen off considerably, and as for the rich Catholics who were to pay off our debts, they are like the ships coming from the East, but whose masts have not yet appeared above the horizon.'

'But does the Prioress still believe that these rich Catholics will come to her aid?'

'Oh, yes, she still believes; she tells us that we must pray, and that if we pray they will come. Well, Father, prayer is very well, but we must try to help ourselves, and we have been thinking it over, and in thinking it over some of us have come to very practical conclusions—'

'You have come to the conclusion that perhaps a good deal of time is wasted in this garden which might be devoted to good works.'

'Yes, that has struck us, and we think the best way out of our difficulties would be a school—a school! Something must be done,' she said, 'and we are thinking of starting a school. We have received a great deal of encouragement. I believe I could get twenty pupils to-morrow, but Mother Prioress won't hear of it. She tells us that we are to pray and that all will come right. But even she does not depend entirely upon prayer; she depends upon Sister Teresa's singing.'

'A most unsatisfactory source of income, I should say.'

'So we all think.'

They walked some paces in silence until they were within a few yards of the end of the walk, and just as they were about to turn the priest said,—

'I was talking at the Bishop's to a priest who has been put in charge of a parish in one of the poorest parts of south London. There is no school, and the people are disheartened, and he has gone to live among them in a wretched house in one of the worst slums of the district. He lives in one of the upper rooms, and has turned the ground floor, which used to be a greengrocer's shop, into a temporary chapel and school, and now he is looking for some nuns to help him in the work. He asked

me if I could recommend any; and I thought of you all here, Sister Winifred, with your beautiful church and garden, doing what I call elegant piety. The more I see of it the less I like it. It has come to seem to me unbearably sad that you and I and those few here who could do such good work should be kept back from doing it.'

'I am afraid our habit, Father, makes that sort of work out of the question for us,' and Sister Winifred dropped her habit for a moment, and let it trail gracefully.

'Long grey habits that a speck of dirt will stain are very suitable to trail over green swards, but not fit to bring into the houses of the poor, for fear they should be spoiled. Oh,' he cried, 'I have no patience with such rules, such petty observances. I have often asked myself why the Bishop chose to put me here where I am entirely out of sympathy, where I am useless, where there is nothing for me to do really except for me to try to keep my temper. I have spoken of this matter to no one before, but since you have come to speak to me, Sister Winifred, I too must speak. Ever since I have been here I have been longing to do some work which I could feel to be the work I was intended to do, which I could feel was my work. It is terrible to continue all one's life doing work that is not one's work.'

'It is the fate of many of us here, Father Daly.'

'If we could make a new foundation—if some three or four of you—if the Bishop would send me there.'

'Of course we might go and do good work in the district you speak of, but I doubt whether the Bishop would recognise us as a new foundation.'

'You were telling me of your project for a school, Sister Winifred.'

Sister Winifred entered into the details of her plan, jerking out little sentences and watching Father Daly with her quick brown eyes. But she had unduly excited Father Daly; he could not listen to her. 'My position here,' he said, interrupting her, 'is an impossible one. The only ones here who consider my advice are the lay Sisters, the admirable lay Sisters who work from morning till evening, and forego their prayers lest you should want

for anything. I am treated very nearly with contempt by nearly all the choir Sisters. Do you think I do not know that I am spoken of as a mere secular priest? Every suggestion of mine meets with some rude answer. You have witnessed a good deal of this, Sister Winifred. I daresay you have forgotten, but I remember it all. You have come to speak to me here because the Prioress will not allow you to spend more than three minutes in the confessional, arrogating to herself the position of your spiritual adviser, allowing to me nothing more than what is to her the mere mechanical act of absolution. I am a mere secular priest, incapable of advising those who live in an order! Have I not noticed her deference to the very slightest word that Father Ambrose deigns to speak to her? with what deference she waits for his words! Now, as to her rule regarding my confessional, I can only say that I have always regarded it as extremely unorthodox, and I'm sure that the amateur confessional which she carries on upstairs would be suppressed were it brought under the notice of Rome. I have long been determined to resist it, and I beg you, Sister Winifred, when you come to me to confession, that you will stay as long as you think proper. On this matter I now see that the Prioress and I must come to an understanding.'

'But not a word, Father Daly, must we breathe to her of what I have come to tell you about. The relaxation of our order must be referred to the Bishop, and with your support— There is the bell, now I must fly. I will tell you more when I come to confession.'

There was enough, even in the very subdued account which Sister Winifred gave of her conversation with the priest, to frighten Mother Philippa. She thought Sister Winifred had gone too far, and that Father Daly was too venturesome. But Sister Winifred quieted her by saying that her proposal did not go any further than to submit the entire matter to the Bishop, and Mother Philippa said, 'I will agree to anything that the Bishop says.'

Sister Winifred's alert eyes were always smiling; she was always thinking, and her thoughts could very nearly be read in her eyes. She was thinking now of her confes-

sion; she was determined to stay ten minutes in the confessional; for if she were to stay ten minutes, the length of her confession could not fail to reach the ears of the Prioress, and this would bring matters to a crisis. By remaining ten minutes in the confessional she would challenge the Prioress's spiritual authority, and in return for this Father Daly would use his influence with the Bishop to induce the Prioress to relax the rule of the community.

So before slipping into the confessional she purposely loitered a moment, and that in itself struck the Prioress, who had just entered the chapel, as peculiar. For the moment she did not think of it further, having her prayers to say; but at the end of five minutes she began to grow impatient, and at the end of ten minutes she felt that her authority had been set aside. Fifteen minutes passed, and then the Prioress resisted with difficulty the temptation to go into the confessional and order Sister Winifred out of it.

The next penitent was the Prioress herself, and Father Daly heard her confession in alarm, wondering if she had been in the chapel all the while.

'It is hard indeed, dear Mother, if one is not even allowed to confess in peace,' Sister Winifred answered, and she tossed her head somewhat defiantly.

'All the hopes of my life are at an end,' the Prioress said to Mother Hilda. 'Everyone is in rebellion against me, and this branch of our order itself is about to disappear. I feel sure that the Bishop will decide against us, he will go with the majority—I think there is a majority against us, and what can we do with this school? Sister Winifred will have to manage it herself; I will resign. It is hard, indeed, that this should happen after so many years of struggle, and after redeeming the convent from its debts —to be divided in the end.'

Mother Hilda did not answer. It seemed to her that the Reverend Mother had read the future aright. But accident, or what seems to us accident, overthrows the best imagined theories.

Next Sunday Father Daly had taken for his text, why he never knew—accident had apparently guided him to do it—the apostolic injunction to work good to all men, and

especially to all those of the household of faith, that prayer does not fulfil the whole duty of man towards God, that work holds an especial place in the course laid down for man's redemption. Father Daly usually spoke with difficulty; his ideas were generally confused, and his sentences involved and very often imperfect. On this day he spoke like one who is inspired. He had foreseen the danger that lay before him in the amplification of the text he had chosen, but it seemed as if he could not stay his words; even the sight of the wax-like face of the Prioress could not stay his ideas on the subject of work. The words sprang to his lips, and he said that he often thought that in their convent they were apt to overlook the necessity of work. Theirs was a life of prayer; but was that incompatible with some measure of active charity? The terrible words forced their way, and he felt himself like a leaf in the current of inspiration. He heard himself say that they did not visit the sick and poor. He heard himself say that he often wondered how they could fill their days. To say this implied that the community lived in the sin of idleness, and the cool chapel seemed suddenly to grow hot, a dryness came into his throat, and he heard the nuns coughing in the silence. The sunlight seemed to fade, and he began to see the bowed heads as through a mist. He began to observe them, and it seemed to him that every nun instinctively drew herself up, and he waited, thinking that one of them, the Prioress—no, she was too proud, Mother Hilda, perhaps—would get up from her stall and leave the chapel, but no one moved, and he mopped his forehead with his handkerchief and went on. He spoke of the monetary difficulties of the convent, and he mentioned that he knew these very well, though he had not been honoured with their confidences in this matter. He said he might have been tempted, if they had honoured him with their confidence on this matter, to suggest they should start a school for young ladies, for which the convent offered exceptional advantages. A school seemed to him a more Christian remedy than the unliturgical musical experiments they had been indulging in. He said he had no belief in attracting people to church by turning the service into a concert, and then paused, frightened at his

own indiscretion. It was a terrible moment, and he added hurriedly that he hoped they would reflect on this matter, and try to remember he was always at their service and prepared to give them the best advice.

When Mass was over, the nuns hung about the cloister, whispering in little groups, forgetful of the rule. The supporters of the Prioress could not hide their indignation at the impertinence of the priest daring to insult the community, and the most ardent supporters of the school felt that he had gone too far.

Sister Winifred walked about aimlessly, in terror lest she should be sent for by the Prioress. Mother Philippa avoided her. The greatest anxiety was shown for the health of the Prioress; the nuns remembered her weak heart and the strain that had been put upon her. Might not the Prioress be in need of help? Was it not their duty to go to her? The infirmarian fetched some sal volatile from her cupboard, but no one, not even Mother Hilda, had courage to knock at the Prioress's door. The tension of the morning was drawn out to an extreme, and when the bell rang summoning them in to dinner, the nuns scarcely knew whether they ought to eat their meal or not. Suddenly the door opened, and the Prioress appeared in all her usual calmness. She took no one into her confidence; she told no one what she had done, not even Mother Hilda. But that night a firmly-worded letter went to the Bishop, and before a month was over Father Daly was transferred to another parish.

XXXI

It was the hour of evening meditation, and the nuns were in choir, all a-row, aslant in their stalls, and so still were they all, and so rigid their attitudes, that they would seem to a spectator like a piece of mediæval wood-carving. One

by one the books had been laid aside. Each nun held her book on her knee, the first finger of the right hand between the leaves to keep the place, so that she could turn in her need to the passage which had inspired her meditation.

In a convent where circumstance is unchanging and no interest is allowed in external things, the government of thought becomes a science, and Evelyn had seen that she must acquire this science. If the subject of the meditation were the cross she must learn to think of the cross and of things immediately related to the cross for half an hour without allowing her thoughts to wander. But this was impossible to her. She could not control her thoughts for more than a few minutes, if for that; and a few minutes' meditation exhausted her more than an hour's dusting or sweeping. Yet there were nuns who could, it was said, meditate for an hour. Evelyn had determined to excel. She had addressed herself to Mother Hilda, who had put the exercises of St Ignatius into her hands, and she had in company of the novices received instruction in his method. But Evelyn could do nothing by method. Her piety, like her acting, was the impulse of the moment, and she had told Mother Hilda that she would never be able to compose time and space, nor would she ever be able to gather up the spiritual bouquet at the close with any satisfaction to herself.

'My dear child,' Mother Hilda had answered, 'no sooner do you find that you can toddle a little way than you want to run. It requires years of practice.'

But Evelyn desired a greater proficiency than she had admitted to Mother Hilda, and after a moment's hesitation she had answered,—

'But surely, dear Mother, it would be better to place oneself in the presence of God and stay there. Why not dispense with active thought altogether; active thought only interferes with the ecstasy of contemplation.'

Mother Hilda had told her of Madame Guyon, and the quietist heresy which had been denounced by Bossuet and condemned at Rome. Evelyn feared heresy very little; and Madame Guyon became one of her heroines. But this sublime heresy she found difficult in practice, and the practice of it was so beset with perils, that she understood

why Rome had denounced it. On ordinary days she had failed to keep her thoughts fixed, and on those special days when she forced herself into the Divine Presence and stayed there till the close of the meditation, her ecstasy was followed by lassitude and a contempt for ordinary prayer. Then, again, she was an inveterate castle-builder; in her, dreaming was a vice like dram-drinking, and on her knees she could pass into an enchanted land where all things were according to her desire. The dream face was as potent as the real face, her dreams were invaded by memories. Now that the convent had become a habit, the past drew nearer. The past had come to watch for her at the hour of meditations. Just now she had waked up from a dream of a day when she and Owen were alone in a German town. It was a Gothic town through which a sluggish river flowed, and its cathedral walls were full of saints. She remembered two virgin saints, but these were in the museum, on either side of a doorway. Their thin, spiritual faces were raised, and about their limbs their draperies fell in straight, thick folds. Her thoughts had not stayed with these saints; they had wandered on with Owen. They were harmless thoughts, and on awaking she had murmured a Hail Mary, for her rule was to say a prayer whenever Owen's or Ulick's face rose up in her mind. And her prayer finished, she returned to the subject of meditation. But the folds of the habits distracted her attention; she noticed Veronica's eyes; they were wondering eyes, and she wondered which of the nuns were thinking most intimately of God. One cannot always be exalted, she thought; it is only by working at piety just as one works at art, that one prepares oneself for the great moments of inspiration. God is scattering the seed always, but it is only in those hearts which are prepared to receive it that it flowers. The poet must write verses every day, the singer must sing every day, and the nun must pray every day, so that they may be inspired one day in the seven. But was this true of everyone? She remembered that Madame Savelli had said she was an exception to this rule, that she was one of the fortunate ones from whom the burden of work had been almost lifted, and

she felt that what was true of her art was true of her religion. Just as there were times when she could hardly sing at all, there were times when she could hardly pray at all, and she had entered upon one of these barren periods. For the last few days she had been depressed and restless, and all the little external pieties of the convent had jarred. The convent was the same as it had always been—they had always talked about vestments and prelates during recreation, and there had always been little wranglings about who was to have candles for her saint and who was not. But these things had not jarred so much as they had done in the last three days, except, perhaps, during the last month or so of her postulancy, before she had been summoned to Rome to see her father die. Since then she had noticed the external convent hardly at all. She had lived in an idea, and all the little discomforts of conventual life and its trivialities had hardly been perceived. Long, long ago Veronica had said to her that she could think of no fate more terrible than to live in a convent without a vocation. She had forgotten that Veronica had ever said this, but now it had been flashed back upon her out of a long past—out of four years, and yet these years had seemed like a single minute. She could think of nothing so like as these convent days; she thought of eggs and of leaves and of sheep, and of all things that are supposed to be alike, but none seemed to her so alike as these convent days.

Suddenly she remembered the day she had seen the convent for the first time. She had driven Monsignor and Father Daly there in her carriage. Ah! those chestnut horses, what had happened to them? were they dead? Maybe they were drawing cabs. A few days later she had gone to confession to Monsignor, and to escape from her lovers she had returned to the convent for a retreat. She remembered the drive back to London, and how she had found Owen Asher waiting for her in the Park Lane drawing-room. How long ago all that seemed now, and how strange that she should remember it. She, a nun, sitting in the choir, her book upon her knees. What strange romance of destiny had brought her here? She saw that afternoon in Park Lane as one sees a sail blotted on the horizon—the

very mood in which she had nearly yielded to Owen. She was sure she would have yielded if he had persisted, but he had refrained. The convent, she supposed, was still in her eyes. The prayers of the nuns had restrained him—could it have been that? And then she remembered one long afternoon in the Park with Ulick. They had stood a long while looking at the spire of Kensington Church, and as they walked home in the twilight he had asked her to marry him, and she had almost consented. He had tried to overrule her will with his, and she had promised to meet him at Victoria. They were to have gone to Dulwich together to her father; they were to have been married at once, so that there could be no turning back. But while sitting by the fire after dinner, thinking every moment she must get up to go to meet him at Victoria, she had been overcome. Never had her will been so completely overcome. She had not been able to get up from her chair. She remembered putting the moment off from five minutes to five minutes, and her strange dreams. When she awoke Merat was by her. She had come to ask her if she had any letters for the post, and to tell her that on the morrow her Cousin Sophie was to take her vows. They had gone together to the convent, and she remembered the Carmelite nun whom she had seen afterwards at the grating. A few days after she had found the Wimbledon convent starving, and had arranged a concert tour in order to get a little money for them. It had been a success until she had gone to stay at Thornton Grange. Lady Ascot, where was she? Owen had made love to her the whole evening, and she had nearly left her room to go to his; but as she was about to go she had heard voices singing the *Veni Creator*, and the hymn had brought appeasement to her senses. She had fallen asleep. The next morning she had left Thornton Grange, and abandoned her tour.

She thought of the year she had lived in Bayswater, looking after Patrick Sullivan and his like, and she remembered how she had met Owen in the slum. He had tried to persuade her that she must not leave her father, however great the necessities of the nuns might be. He had offered to bet that Monsignor would say the

same, and Monsignor had taken Owen's view of her duty; and she agreed to abandon the convent to its fate, but how vain her resolution had been. Her father had been summoned to Rome, and she had gone to live in the convent for three months, until he was settled in Rome and had found a house for her to live in. At the end of a few months, when she thought she would have to leave the convent and return to her father, when she wished to leave it, when she was weary of it, a letter had come from Monsignor saying her father was ill, and she had gone to Rome to see him die. But notwithstanding the break in her postulancy, the Bishop had given his consent to her clothing. . . . She paused, abashed at finding so much design in her life—all incoherences vanished. She thought of a fish swimming in front of a net. At first the net is so far away that the fish does not perceive it, then gradually the meshes drift nearer, and the fish perceives that it narrows to a thin neck from which there is no escape. . . , Her life seemed to have been ordained from the beginning; she seemed to have been created for a special purpose.

She used to think that she was deficient in will, and then that she had a great deal of will, for she resisted all the pressure that the world could bring against her. There was Owen's love and his wealth, and Ulick with a different spirituality from that of the convent, and there were all the innumerable influences—the influence of Louise and Lady Ascot, and other influences half forgotten and half remembered, and all had proved unavailing. She had come to the conclusion she had an exceptionally strong will, and now it seemed to her that she had neither a feeble will nor a strong will, but had been created to do a certain work, and her life seemed to her like a long skein. A great deal of the skein was already unwound, and was the end of the skein the redemption of the convent from debt? Was it true that God managed our affairs, even in such small particulars as the financial difficulties of a convent? She had sometimes wondered at her own disinterestedness, but to redeem the convent from debt it was necessary that someone should be supremely disinterested.

The nuns got up and the procession left the chapel, and

during recreation she walked with the Reverend Mother, speaking very little, unable to think because of the caressing touch of the air upon her cheek, excited by the colour of the border that had begun to light up, and stirred into sympathy with the brook that babbled through the underwoods on its way to the river. Remembrance of Owen and Ulick flashed through her mind, and no sooner had she put one set of memories aside than another arose. Again and again she caught herself thinking of her lovers, wondering if any one of them would have inspired her with the love which she now felt herself capable of giving. She had never really loved—not Owen, not Ulick, though she had loved Ulick better. The thousand and one distractions of her life at that time had prevented her loving then as she could love now. It seemed to her that she had learnt to love; but she did not think a man could love a nun. Yet who could love so well as a nun?

It seemed to her she must have been thinking a long while; and a few days after she caught herself questioning the usefulness of their lives in this convent, nor could she deny to herself that she sympathised with the schismatics who had wished to turn the contemplative into an active order. Would an active order satisfy her? She thought not. She was afraid she desired the personal life—the life she had told Monsignor was dead to her; to attain that she would have to leave the convent, and the very thought of breaking her holy vows filled her with terror. But when she lay down to sleep the thought of the personal came upon her between sleeping and waking. If she were to leave the convent what would she do? A nun who had broken her vows would always be an anomaly. She would be out of place wherever she went. And sitting up in her bed, seeing her cell in the light of the moon, she remembered how she had written to Monsignor telling him that when she left the convent she proposed to take a cottage in the country with a large garden, and that she would have five or six little cripple boys to live with her. If her father had not died she would have done this somewhere near Rome, or in England—somewhere within easy reach of her father. But God had designed her for another purpose,

and she must thank Him that she had been allowed to accomplish that purpose, or nearly. She wished that it had not been accomplished so soon, for until it was accomplished she had something to live for. Though she might not question the will of God, she might pray that He would be kind to her, and treat her very gently like one who has done her work and has earned some peaceful years. She hoped He would not allow her to be tempted again by the flesh ; that He would take out of her mind all thoughts of the men she had known and of the men she had sinned with.

The sin of fornication—that terrible sin—had always been her trouble, and in the years she would have to live in the convent now, doing nothing, having accomplished His work, she prayed that He would take pity on her, and never allow her to be tempted again.

XXXII

She was so weary of singing Gounod's 'Ave Maria' that she had intentionally accentuated the vulgarity of the melody, and wondered if the caricature had been noticed. 'The more vulgarly it is sung, the more money it draws.' Smiling at the theatrical phrase that had arisen unexpectedly to her lips, she went into the garden. There she heard that she had never sung so well ; all the nuns seemed to agree with Sister Elizabeth, and Evelyn looked from face to face, not finding the slightest perception of the truth in any one. Suddenly they seemed divided from her, and wondering what her father would have said if he had lived to hear her sing as she had sung that afternoon, she walked aside, pretending an interest in the flowers. It was then that the Prioress joined them in the garden, and she told Evelyn that a lady had been so moved by the beauty of her singing that she had promised to send them a cheque for fifty pounds.

'So you see, God has given you strength to accomplish what you intended to accomplish. Now we are free from debt.'

The sun was setting; the earth drew a calm deep breath under the lovely sky, and Evelyn's soul dilated and was drawn into mysterious sympathy with the flowering earth. 'How beautifully the evening wears its sacramental air,' she said, and she lifted the cup of a lily as she would lift a sleeping child from its cradle, and wondered why a prayer should be more pleasing to God than simple attendance on this flower. And thinking of the flower she walked with the Prioress to the end of the garden. There were many visitors in the garden that day, and it seemed to these two nuns that they might leave their visitors to be entertained by Sister Jerome and Sister Winifred for a little while longer. They might do this without impropriety; and they wandered as far as the fish pond, and stood listening to the stream, loath to return to the ladies, who wished to compliment Evelyn on having freed the convent from debt.

'I'm afraid we must go back, Teresa.'

'Dear Mother Jerome is amusing them. I heard her telling them that St Joseph's statue had to go up to town to get a new coat of paint, and that the Virgin had to go with him to be mended.'

The Prioress smiled, and at that moment Sister Jerome appeared on the pathway, and they had not walked many yards when they met the lady who had sent Sister Jerome to fetch them.

'I remember hearing you sing at Covent Garden,' said the effusive woman.

'You must not speak to me of my unregenerate days,' and then, becoming serious, she said, 'All that is far away.'

'My favourite piece of music is that "Ave Maria," and I did not know it was so beautiful till I heard it sung to-day. Are you not very proud, Sister Teresa, of being able to get so much money out of the public?'

'I take very little interest in my singing. I thought I had sung very badly this afternoon—in fact, I know I did, but it seemed to please.'

The Prioress continued the conversation, and Evelyn

regretted she had been told that the last portion of the debt had been paid. Henceforth there was nothing to strive for, nothing to hope for, and every day would be the fellow of the same as the day before. The idea of the school seemed to have gone with Father Daly, and the schism which seemed too terrible at the time now seemed better than the noiseless monotony which was to be the future. Henceforth nothing would happen to break the peace of their lives, and she saw the days and nights folding and unfolding like heavy curtains. Her life would be like Sister Bridget's, and she thought of what Sister Bridget's life had been. She had been more than forty years in this convent; the thirtieth of this month would be the fortieth anniversary of her vows, and Evelyn remembered that she too might live till she was seventy. With the exception of Mother Lawrence, who was now completely bedridden, Bridget was the oldest member of the community. Yet she continued to scrub, and to sweep, and to carry up coals and water regularly as she had done these last forty years. Everyone loved Sister Bridget's funny old face, and it was felt that something ought to be done to commemorate the anniversary of her vows.

'I should like to see her on an elephant, riding round the garden; what a spree it would be,' said Sister Jerome.

The words were hardly out of her mouth when she regretted them, foreseeing allusions to elephants till the end of her days; for Sister Jerome often said foolish things, and was greatly quizzed for them. Of course she knew they could not get an elephant. She knew too that they would not be able to control an elephant if they did get one. But this time it seemed as if her foolish remark were going to escape ridicule. Sister Agatha said she did not see why they should not make an elephant, and in a moment everyone was listening. Sister Agatha's notion was to take the long table from the library and pile it up with cushions, stuffing it, as nearly as possible, into the shape of an elephant.

'That is exactly as I had intended,' said Sister Jerome.

And the creation of the beast was accomplished in the novitiate, no one being allowed to see it except the Reverend Mother. The great difficulty was to find beads large enough

for the eyes, and it threatened to frustrate the making of their beast. The latest postulant suggested that perhaps the buttons off her jacket would do. They were just the thing, and the legs of the beast were most natural and life-like ; it had even a tail.

As no one out of the novitiate had seen this very fine beast, the convent was on tiptoe with excitement, and when, at the conclusion of dinner, the elephant was wheeled into the refectory, everyone clapped her hands, and there were screams of delight. Then the saddle was brought in and attached by blue ribbons. Sister Bridget, who did not seem quite sure that the elephant was not alive, was lifted on to it, and held there, and wheeled in triumph round the refectory. The nuns clapped their hands, and rushed after the beast, pushing it a little way, beseeching Sister Bridget not to get off but to allow herself to be drawn once more round the room. Flowers were fetched and scattered. There was no reason why Evelyn should disapprove, nor did she disapprove. She tried to remember that she had often seen grown-up people acting quite as childishly, nevertheless she asked,—

'Am I going to spend the whole of my life with these women who are no better than little children ?'

The novices rushed about screaming with delight, and the professed too—the older the nuns were the more eagerly did they enter into the sport, and in the midst of a dispute as to who was to ride it next Evelyn stole away into the garden.

The parched ground was cracking, and, filled with pity for the thirsting plants, she filled a can with water, and shed a refreshing sprinkle over them, not drowning them under a torrent as Sister Elizabeth did when she helped her in the garden. 'But they do not like this cold well water,' she said, and she looked at the cloudless sky for a cloud. A cloud had passed some minutes ago, but it was high up in the sky, and it had flown away. 'The flowers would give a great deal for three hours of fine, small, dense rain. How they would enjoy it,' and standing with her eyes fixed on the dusty horizon, she began to sing some of Isolde's music.

It was five years since she had sung it, and in five years she had forgotten nearly all of it. Other ideas had absorbed her. Yet it was in quest of this idea that she had gone to Ireland. She remembered Chapelizod, a few cottages, a

miserable inn, and a dirty river. But Tristan and Isolde had walked together there. Afterward she had gone with Ulick to see some Druid altars, and sitting on the hill above the altars, they had talked of the primal mysteries, of gods, demi-gods and great heroes.

The childish gaiety of the nuns streamed through the windows into the garden.

'Can they be still dragging that elephant about?'

She got up abruptly like one moved by a sudden intention.

'Does another quest lie before me?' She tried to stifle the thought, but it cried across her life, like a curlew across waste lands.

XXXIII

It seemed to her that the server trudged too and fro carrying the book as if it were a bundle of sticks. He seemed to ring the bell stupidly; the ritual seemed ridiculous; and she hid her face in her hands in order that she might fix her thoughts on the mystery of the bread and wine. But she could only think of the enigma of the stars; a vast cobweb spun into endless space; and in such a pantheistic mood she felt that she dared not go to the sacred table. The priest waited a moment, thinking she had forgotten, and when she went to the Prioress's room at the end of the week the Prioress's first words were,—

'My dear Teresa, I noticed that you did not communicate once this week.'

She could only say that an overwhelming sense of her unworthiness had obliged her abstention. She could not bring herself to confess that she, Sister Teresa, a nun dedicated to perpetual adoration, did not believe, or had

doubts regarding the actual presence of God in the sacramental wafer.

There was a time, she remembered it well, when her communions alone marked the passage of time. She remembered how she used to count the hours which divided her from God, how she welcomed sleep, for sleep obliterated consciousness of time. And she remembered how she used to awake in the morning thinking that the hour of the Lord was by. She used to go to the communion table with a wonderful flutter in her breast, keen hunger for the divine food. As she knelt, her head bowed, she was conscious only of her soul and God; she hardly dared open her mouth; and as the sacrament dissolved she was taken with a great fear, for to swallow seemed like sacrilege, and she covered her face lest the action of swallowing should be perceived. When she had swallowed, the sense of happiness and immortal union grew more intense; her senses seemed to consume one by one, and she was conscious of an exquisite harmony, in which every atom seemed to beat in unison with another atom. In those days she used to live in God, God was always about her, and the sense of God's presence enveloped her, and looking back upon that time it seemed to her that she had been dead or sleeping ever since, and it seemed as if the thick besetting dream of circumstance would never break again.

She noticed the quality of the food and the length of time in chapel, and every day she found it more difficult to think of God, more difficult to keep her lovers out of her mind, and the music that she used to sing for their delight. One day she began to play the prelude to 'Lohengrin' from impulse and to see what an effect it would have on Veronica, and when she had finished she asked her for her idea of it.

'It seemed to me,' she said, 'as if I stood waiting on some mountain top, somewhere where there is no boundary. The dawn seemed to be breaking, light seemed to increase, the rays grew brighter, and my soul seemed to be waiting amid the increasing light.'

'Yes, it is that, Veronica—that is a very good description; how did you think of it?'

'I did not think it. . . . I felt like that.'

'Elsa sings a beautiful melody in the balcony—listen. After singing it she said, 'It is deep as the hush of the summer night. How the voice falls on the word *calme*.'

'Oh, Sister, that music is not like our life here. . . . It is far away. You used to sing that music, and yet you came here.'

'Perhaps I came here to escape from it, Veronica.'

The prelude to 'Tristan' and the 'Forest Murmurs,' and the Rhine journey could not but trouble the quiet souls of Sister Elizabeth and Sister Veronica, and Evelyn knew that in playing this music to them she was doing a wicked thing. But a strange will had taken possession of her and she had to obey it. She stopped in the cloister to remember that she had saved the convent, and now she wished to destroy it. Was this really so? She could not believe it. Good heavens! Why did she hate those nuns? Was it possible that she hated them? Did she wish to destroy the peace of mind of her innocent companions? No, she did not desire such wickedness. She could not help herself; something was behind her, and she began to fear she was possessed by the devil.

And though she feared her brain was going the way Miss Dingle's had gone, she could not resist the temptation to wear a blue scapular. And she listened more attentively than she ever did before to Miss Dingle's experiences. At last, unable to bear her present state of mind any longer, she resolved to consult the chaplain.

'I have come to consult you, Father, about a great many things; if you have finished with your other penitents perhaps you may be able to give me a little more time than usual.'

He seemed to awake from a pious lethargy. The new chaplain reminded Evelyn of Sister Cecilia.

'Father, I have come to confess certain sins and obtain forgiveness for these sins. But over and above my sins I have come to consult you, and I feel you will be able to give me the advice I want.'

It seemed to her that she had better begin by telling him her general attitude of mind towards the convent, for

she wished him to understand that a change had come, whether transitory or permanent she did not know. An enumeration of her little criticisms of the nuns would convey no true picture of her trouble, and yet it was all so instinct with her trouble that she felt she must tell him that she had smiled at the excitement of the novices and the younger nuns over the shrines in the passages and in the garden.

'I have been lacking in humility—that, I suppose, is what it comes to.'

Fearing any inclination to extenuate, she entered into details, and then her confession seemed to her sillier and more trivial than the pious fancies that had excited her irony, and she hurried on, trying to hit upon something definite, some less evanescent emotion, which could be expressed by words. If she could say something that the priest would understand, something that would help him to divine the very real trouble and unrest of soul. But she could express nothing of what she felt. The fact that she had emphasised sentences, which even caricatured the sentiment of a popular piece of music did not seem to him a serious sin; and settling his cassock over his knees, he reminded her that singing had paid off the convent's debts.

'Yes, I know,' she said, 'and that very day a lady was so delighted with the "Ave Maria" that she sent the last fifty pounds required to pay off the debt.'

'On that very day! Now I will give you absolution.'

'But, Father, there is a real burden on my mind, and you must have patience with me, for my trouble is very real, and I want your advice.'

Again the priest settled his cassock and concentrated his attention.

'I have thought of men whom I knew before I entered the convent, whom I knew sinfully. I have not been able to keep their faces and recollections of my sins out of my mind. I do not know if you know that I was an opera singer before I became a nun. . . . I thought that the opera singer was dead in me, but the other day I played some of the music I used to sing. I don't know if I am deceiving myself, but it seemed to me that I played that

music to the nuns in order to trouble their lives as mine has been troubled. I can imagine no sin more horrible, and I hope I have not been guilty of it.'

The priest asked her what music she had played, and when she told him he said,—

'But I do not know any more devotional music than the prelude to "Lohengrin," and the other music you speak of seems to me to be entirely unobjectionable. I have taken great pleasure in it myself—the prelude to "Parsifal," for instance.'

'But I wish to forget that music; it is full of associations for me, and my intentions in playing it were—'

'I do not think, my daughter, that you are in a frame of mind to judge your intentions. We are not responsible for passing thoughts.'

There still remained her doubts regarding the Real Presence, and she said,—

'I cannot imagine anything more terrible than to be a nun, vowed to perpetual adoration, and not to believe implicitly in the Real Presence. . . . I can imagine no more terrible fate, and that fate may be mine—I was going to say is perhaps mine already.'

'But, my dear child, you do not say that you do not believe in the Real Presence, and if you do not deny you believe.'

'Does that follow, Father? I certainly do not deny. I do not even disbelieve, but I fear my faith in the sacrament is waning. Think what my position would be in the convent if such a thing were to happen.'

'It can only be that the trial you are now enduring has been sent to test you, and you must pray.'

'But, Father, I seem to have lost control of my thoughts. Only this morning, when you bent down over the altar to take the sacrament, trivial thoughts passed through my mind; is it necessary that I should tell them to you?'

'No, it is not necessary.'

'They are so vivid and near me, and yet they do not seem like my thoughts, and sometimes I fear to turn my head lest I should see the devil. I have almost come to be-

lieve in him as Miss Dingle does—I mean in his visible presence and in his power to lay material hands on me. Think, then, what it must be to kneel before the altar? I cannot shake this haunting spirit out of me. Not only blasphemous, but indecent thoughts rise up in my mind, and they are so distinct and clear that I cannot but think the devil is whispering in my ear. I must tell you all. The moment I kneel to take my watch the voice begins, and the last time I communicated . . .'

She ceased speaking and hid her face in her hands.

'There is no reason why you should recall these painful visitations.'

'Yes, visitations; they can be nothing else. I dare not communicate; you have noticed my abstention? If these thoughts do not cease I cannot live in the convent—I cannot live in blasphemy.'

'Have you spoken to the Prioress on this matter?'

'No.'

The Prioress reserved the spiritual guidance of her nuns to herself . . . Father Daly had been dismissed for interference. The chaplain reflected. He could think of no argument which would convince her of the Real Presence in the Eucharist. His brain seemed a little torpid that afternoon. Had he not better refer the penitent to the Prioress? On the other hand, would it be right to avoid the responsibility that had come upon him. But at that moment an argument was being revealed to him, and he began, though he knew he risked a great deal; the three minutes, the limit of time the Prioress allowed her nuns in the confessional, were over long ago.

'My dear child, your position is very serious. But God never deserts those who do not desert Him.'

And while trying to disentangle an argument wherewith to convince her of the Real Presence, he spoke to her of the sin of despair, the most terrible of all sins, and the one to be dreaded most. 'If we accept the evidence of our senses,' he said, 'we would believe the earth to be flat and stationary. But this conflicts with the evidence of our senses regarding the rising and setting of constellations, and so it is with the mystery of Transubstantiation. If

we accept our immediate sensation, no change has taken place during the words of consecration, and God is not in the sacred wafer any more than He is in any other wafer; but just as in astronomy we arrive at an absurdity if we do not accept the theory of the motion of the earth, so do we arrive at an absurdity in theology if we do not accept the teaching of our holy Church. To call into question the Real Presence in the sacred wafer not only calls into question the trustworthiness of the Church's teaching, but also the very words of Christ, who said, "Take and eat, for this is My body," and again, "This is My blood of the New Testament, which is shed for you and for many for the remission of sins." Then this doctrine in the New Testament must be dismissed as a fable, for did not Christ say, "I came not to destroy the law but to fulfil it." So, you see, to deny any one article of the faith involves a denial of everything, and if Christ be not God, and the New Testament a myth, then all the world, and all the stars and everything that happens in life are but a series of chances.'

'Yes, Father, yes, and it is a great help to me to hear you; and what you say is quite true. I used to believe that this world and human life were due to a series of chances.'

'And the scientific explanation failed to satisfy you. I will give you some books to read on the subject, and with patience and prayer your doubts will pass away, my dear child.'

The priest then said a little prayer with her, and he gave her absolution for any fault that might be hers in not resisting more strenuously the thoughts that had come, against her will, from a far time.

XXXIV

One night in her convent bed she saw flames about her, and she began to remember the scene—how it begins with

Siegfried's own motive, and underneath it the ripple of the Rhinegold.

The day has begun ; the last rosy clouds vanish in light melodies, cool as the wind blowing out of the dawn, and the hero stands on the mountain-top. Below him the warrior woman sleeps in her war gear, surrounded by flames, and at once is heard the mysterious 'Question to Fate.' Evelyn's eyes closed, and she dreamed 'The Love spell,' as it emerges from the orchestra ; and the young hero, whose mother she had rescued, descended the rocks to her side, and amid enchanting melodies—'Love's Confusion,' 'Love's Rapture,' and 'Love's Delight'—he took her buckler and her helmet from her, and looking upon her breasts, dreamed she might unclasp her girdle for him in the pine wood close by.

The nun strove against the dream, but God seemed to have abandoned her ; and she could not resist the temptation of mortal lips ; the music overtook her as a net overtakes the escaping fish, she heard her vows die as Siegfried's lips pressed hers apart. The music rose out of the depths of the orchestra ; it ascended to the heights on the violins, and she heard the exultant chords expressive of her rapture when she awakens to the beauty of the world. Sitting up on the rock where she has lain for so many years, she asks, 'Who is the hero who has awakened me ?' and they both sing the rapture of the meeting.

Siegfried watches her as the sun watches the marvel of the spring. He sings his wonder at her beauty, and a pang of reciprocal longing awakens, and her delight is like earth's answer to the sun. What accents of courage and triumph, and amid them her own 'justification,' for had she not been compassionate to the unhappy parents ? The impetuous boy implores her, but in the midst of her desire she remembers she is a goddess, and again, amid the temptation to yield to the delight of the senses, she hears the theme of 'Renunciation.' To surrender to love is to surrender her immortal life ; and her elemental nature rises up like the wind ; and she hears her sisters fly by her. But in spite of her endeavour to resist she turns her eyes to Siegfried, and she sees him leading her into the

fir wood, and her senses sicken a little as she thinks how she may unclasp her girdle for his pleasure and for hers. And amid the flutter and rapture of such melodious phrases as 'Love's Confusion' and 'Love's Rapture' the gods strive vainly for her virginity. She turns to the fir wood, her hands fall to her girdle, but she hears the theme of Valhalla.

The nun's face grew pale in her dream, and she tossed on her bed, for she was striving to remember. The next part of the scene seemed to elude her, and she seems to wander through long woods, following some distant and evasive music sung by a bird. At last, coming to a rocky desert place, 'The Curse' is suddenly thundered in her ears, and she remembers that death follows all delight. But immediately peaceful memories breathe in her ears. Siegfried is beside her, she is enfolded in her desire of him, though she hears in the quivering air some faint echo of tremulous annihilation. She listens, and the alluring dimness of the Valhalla motive overcomes her, and breaking away she foregoes the fatal gift of love. But Siegfried sings his irresistible phrase, his triumphal 'Come what May,' and the joy of life is accepted amid the tempestuous beat of the flying hoofs of 'The Ride,' the mysterious call of the bird; and the love themes are repeated, and after them 'The Heritage of the World' is heard. 'Siegfried's own Motive' rises out of the depths, and the boy and the maid exult in a final trill.

The nun's eyes opened, and she lay with wide open eyes in a state between sleeping and waking, her thoughts so completely detached from her will that she seemed to be listening rather than thinking. She lay quiescent, and her whole life seemed to be read out to her, and at the end of the long reading she answered, 'No Siegfried will come to release me from this prison of invisible bars. And if Siegfried came to release me from these flames—for every will is a flame—of what use should I be to him?' 'Of what use' repeated like an antiphone, and at the end of each verse she repeated, 'What use should I be to him?' and this was sometimes followed by the addition, 'or to anyone? God has cast me off,' she cried, 'and men have cast me off, and

my present singing would appeal to them as little as my body. No man can love me again.'

In the silence of the dawn, the evening she had found Owen waiting for her in her drawing-room at Park Lane returned. She had been near to yielding to him, but he had refrained, though he loved her as much as ever. She had not understood at the time, only long afterwards, and by degrees, that the prayers of the nuns had withheld him from her. The prayers of the nuns had withheld her from him in Thornton Grange. Ah, how dim a spectre she would seem to him now, and to Ulick too, who in his pagan mysticism hated Christianity even more than Owen.

She suddenly became aware that the convent had moulded her to its ideas more completely than Owen Asher had done; her insomnia was like a glass in which she saw herself clearly; the very ends of her soul were revealed to her. It seemed to her that she must die, so great was her fear. She shrank from the convent, the chapel, the refectory, and the passages were reflected upon her brain. The nuns passed by her, and she knew their faces in every minute inflection of line, in every slight difference of colour, and she heard them tell her that this was the end, that no further change would come into her life. As they passed her she asked them if her life would be prolonged, but they passed without answering her question, and she thought how friendless the convent would be when the Prioress died. Sister Mary John was the only one to whom she could tell her trouble of soul, the only one who could help her to bear the trial of her unfaith. It seemed to her that she had been strangely indifferent to her friend's departure. She had forgotten her quickly, and it seemed to her that during the term of their friendship she had always been curiously unresponsive. Evelyn saw her friend far away in France. She might be dead, she would never hear of her again, and she cried out, 'Come back!' hoping the cry might reach her.

It was Sister Mary John's faith that had inspired her; it was Sister Mary John's example that had helped her to believe that the Real Presence was the one true reality. Now she remembered that she had said to Sister Mary John,

'Nothing seems to me so real as the sacrament, not even you, whom I can see and touch with my hands. . . .' What sin had been theirs? What shadow of sin had Sister Mary John seen in their friendship? Something less than a shadow, and lest this shadow of a shadow should define itself, she had left her alone in the convent.

She had been in bed three hours, and she was weary of thinking, and for three weeks she had hardly slept; and in the lucidity of these white nights she had read her life. At first she had allowed herself to read it for a few moments, just to see if she remembered it, but gradually she had yielded more and more to the temptation of remembrance. Her stage lovers, and her other lovers, even her admirers, men whose names she did not even remember, returned to her. One of these was a young Russian. She remembered the evening they had stood on a hill-top overlooking the city; from where they stood they could see the harbour and the ships; and she remembered the blown trees and the faded grass, and the young man, who was a prince, had pressed her to marry him. If she had done so she would now be a Russian princess living among the Steppes, whereas she was now a nun living in the Wimbledon convent. She never would see him again. Had he discovered someone to marry him, and did he ever think of her? she wondered. Yes, far away in the Steppes he thought of her sometimes.

She remembered the names of actors she had acted with, she remembered when they had sung well and when they had sung badly. Perhaps the pleasantest days to remember were the days when she went to her singing lessons every morning, and when Owen had come from England to visit them. They had given dinner-parties and dances in that house, in the Rue Balzac, and she remembered that Owen had to leave her to escape from the torment of desire. She remembered that it was difficult for them to sit in the same room when others were present.

But this life of sin had been forgiven her, and to save herself from memories of Owen she had to think of Ulick's gentleness, and the different delight she had taken by his side. She thought of the days they had spent in Ireland, and fell asleep, dreaming of a long beautiful day in the lonely country.

But before the first bird began to sing her sleep had become broken, and when the first bird chirped a cry escaped from her, and she moaned and seemed to resist someone. 'No, oh, no, Owen, I cannot.' Then her voice sank to a murmur and she waved her arms. 'It is sacrilege,' she cried, and she sank back. 'Stay here with me, no one will know you are here, but in the chapel you may be seen. I cannot do that, I cannot commit sacrilege; God would never forgive that.'

She lay stark and white beneath the obscene oppression, unable to resist Owen, who led her from her cell to the chapel where the nuns were assembled at Mass. All the way down the stairs she besought him, asking him why he wished this one thing. There was a strange leer in his eyes, and his lips were strangely curled when he said she dared not go for she knew Monsignor was the celebrant. He grasped her by the wrist and dragged her, and though she resisted with the other arm, placing it against the doorpost, she was hurled along, her strength giving way each time. The chapel door was open, and all the nuns were in choir. She could see her empty place, but the nuns did not seem to see it was empty; they were deep in prayer. She was not certain who was the celebrant. It might be Monsignor as Owen had said. She could not see the celebrant very distinctly, but the server she saw quite distinctly. The server was Veronica, and she wore a surplice. She had disguised herself, but her naked feet showed beneath the surplice, and when she changed the book from the right to the left Evelyn feared she would be discovered.

All this while Owen and Evelyn were hiding behind a pillar, and they watched Veronica, who, regardless of the danger of discovery, stood by the celebrant, helping him to find the place in the book. Evelyn besought Owen to come back to her cell with her, but they remained in hiding, and at the Elevation it seemed to her it was not Monsignor who was saying Mass, but a satyr—a satyr whom she had once seen in a picture in the Munich Gallery, and she watched the vestments, catching sight every now and then of the hoofs. Then, forgetting the celebrant, she watched the nuns, thinking every moment one of them would look towards

where she and Owen were hiding, and one did look, but to Evelyn's surprise she did not seem to see them.

On the altar a statue lay at length, and Evelyn was puzzled to explain its presence along the altar. The priest continued to say Mass as if he were not aware of the statue, or even inconvenienced by it, and then it seemed to Evelyn not to be a statue but a woman. She noticed that the face was like one of the nuns—she could not tell which, and as the priest bowed his head the woman looked round and watched. Monsignor came from the sacred table to give them communion, and as he was about to return to the altar he caught sight of her and Owen, though Owen had shrunk into the shadow of the pillar. He asked him what he had come for, and Owen answered 'to communicate.' She besought Owen to say that he had not come to commit sacrilege; but Owen begged the priest to give him the sacred Host. He put it into his handkercief, and as they were about to leave the church a sharp rap at the door awoke her.

It was the Sister who had come to tell her to watch before the sacrament.

'I cannot, I cannot get up.'

'Are you ill, Sister?'

'Yes, I am very ill indeed. I cannot watch to-day, I cannot; someone else must take my place.'

XXXV

THERE was no will in her to get up; she lay quite still, her eyes wide open and her look was vague like an animal's. She did not dare to rouse herself lest any stir might bring back a glimpse of her dream. There was no sign of life in her, except that her face sometimes contracted in an expression of suffering, and when at last she slipped out of bed and began to dress herself, she was certain that come what may she could not endure another month in the convent. The

alternative of leaving the convent no longer frightened her. Even if it were to kill the Prioress she must leave; her own soul was at stake, and every moment she lingered in this convent, she was losing it.

She hastened a little so that she might be in time for Mass, and she had begun to hope she might be able to pray. To pray ever so little would alter everything. But when she knelt among the nuns her heart was empty and prayer seemed like sacrilege. The worst was that at the Elevation she could think of nothing but her dream. She doubted no longer that her soul was a lost soul, and to live with her soul, knowing it to be lost, was really hell. Only by leaving the convent could she save her soul. But she could not see the Prioress till noon, and it seemed as if she could not live through her anxiety. She did not dare to think; and at dinner she crumbled a piece of bread and drank a little water, thankful for the silence, for she would not have been able to answer if she had been spoken to.

After dinner she escaped from recreation and went into the chapel and tried to pray. She called, but He answered not, and unable to control her nerves she left the chapel, and catching sight of the Prioress in the passage she hurried after her, but paused at the foot of the stairs to think the matter out. Thinking did not help her; the knot remained untied in spite of all her trembling thoughts, and she went upstairs.

The firm, white face, and the old wrinkled hands turning over some papers unnerved her, and she thought of the chill eyes reading in the recesses of her soul.

'I know, my dear child, that the great crisis of your life has begun. It began some weeks ago. I did not question you; disease ripens best in silence. Sit down, and we will talk about it.'

Evelyn dropped into a chair.

'If you knew, Mother, what I have to say to you, you could not speak like that. If I am to save my soul I must leave; it has come to that.'

She spoke with feverish simplicity, telling that her motives were spiritual, that it was because she feared she

could not believe sufficiently, and not on account of any desire of the world, or of the men whom she had once loved; they were dead to her, the trouble of the flesh had died out of her; such temptations were light, they could be repressed almost at will.

'I feel that I can love God better in the world.'

'But if you were to return to the world, the passion that you control here would subdue you, and all the struggle would have been in vain. Do you not think that this is so?'

'Oh, no, Mother, I do not think so. The struggle would not have been in vain—God would take it into account. That may not be true doctrine; I fear that it is not, and it is the doctrine and not the flesh that I fear. It is not true that the roots of doubt are in the flesh, though I thought so once, and Monsignor once told me so.'

'So you think, my dear child, that you would be safer in the world than you are here, and that you would be leading a life more pleasing to God?'

'Yes, I cannot think otherwise, and if I could tell you all, you too would think so.'

'Should I?'

The two women sat looking at each other, and then Evelyn said, 'I am the unhappiest of women, and the most unfortunate, I think. Imagine a nun, dedicated to perpetual adoration, and unable to believe in the sacrament.'

'You mean, Teresa, that your faith is no longer as complete or as fervent as it was. That may be, nothing is more likely; we should be too happy if a sensible faith were always by us.'

'I have thought of all that, Mother. But my case is different. There is no hope for me—my soul is lost—God has deserted me.'

'But what you say, my dear child, is unthinkable. God cannot withdraw belief in His presence in the sacrament in order that you may return to the world.'

'I see that I cannot make you understand. No one can understand another, and perhaps I am difficult to understand. You cannot understand—I mean sympathise

—of course you cannot sympathise with my leaving the convent, that is one of my afflictions. You will always misjudge me, and it is not your fault. No one can lay before another the life that passes in her soul. . . . Words are ineffectual to explain it. With words you can tell the exterior facts of life; but you cannot tell the intense yet involuntary life of the soul—that intricate and unceasing life, incomprehensible as an ant heap, and so personal though it is involuntary.'

At that moment a sudden haunting of her last night's dream sprang upon her, bringing her, as it were, to bay, and she said, 'If it were not for my dreams, Mother.'

'Your dreams are involuntary, so you are not responsible.'

'I have thought of that too, but another night like last night, and I should go mad. I thought this morning I should go mad. I can only think that I must be possessed with the devil. If I could but tell you the dream you would think so too.'

'The devil possesses no one who does not desire him. You are excited and cannot control your nerves; but a little time will bring the change.'

Then the Reverend Mother mentioned one who, the Scripture said, had had an evil spirit cast out of her; and Evelyn mentioned another, and the question was discussed for a while. Both were conscious of the irrelevancy, but neither could disentangle herself from it, and it allowed Evelyn to consider the wretchedness of her plight if she returned to the world, and the Reverend Mother to think how she could save her from the fatal step. Suddenly there came a silence, and Evelyn said,—

'I became a nun, I am thinking, too late, or too soon. I can understand the acceptation of the religious life by those who passed, like Veronica, from the schoolroom to the novitiate; and there are those who enter the convent late in life, when the vine of life has perished, in disappointment, in misfortune.'

The two nuns sat a long while without speaking.

'Yes, Teresa, the vine of life gathers round and captures and overgrows our natural love of God. You were seven

or eight-and-twenty, I think, when you came here first—I was twenty-five when my husband died. Before I was married I often used to come to the convent. I was fond of the nuns, and I was a pious girl, and, like you, I once made a retreat when I was sixteen or seventeen. But after our marriage I forgot our holy religion, and thought seldom of God. I was captured by life, the vine of life grew about me and held me tight. One day, passing by the door of the convent, my husband said, "It is lucky that love rescued you, for when I met you you were a little taken by the convent, and might have become a nun. If you had not fallen in love," he said, "you might have shut yourself up in there—fancy you shut up in there draped in a grey habit." I wore that day a grey silk dress, and I remember taking the skirt up as we passed the door and hitting the kerb stone with it. "Shut up in that prison house! how could I ever have thought of such a thing!" These were my words, but God in His great goodness and wisdom resolved to bring me back to Him. A great deal is required to save our souls, so deeply are we enmeshed in the delight of life, and in the delight of one another. So God took my husband from me after an illness of three weeks. This happened forty years ago—far away from here I used to sit on the seashore crying all day. My little child used to put his arms about me and say, "What is mamie crying for?" Then my child died, seemingly without any reason, and I felt that I could not live any longer amid the desires and activities of men. I will not try to tell you what my grief was; you have suffered grief, and may imagine it. I left my home at once and hurried here, just as you did. When I saw you return here after your father's death I could not but think of my own returning. I saw myself in you. But we nuns do not speak of our past lives, and if I have told you it is because a force within me impelled me to do so. It may help you; one never knows what may help another—help comes unexpectedly, and from an unexpected side.'

'Thank you, dear Mother, I know what it must have cost you to speak of these past things. There is a great lesson in all you have said.'

At that moment the question of whether the death of a father was as wide and deep a distraction in the life of a woman as the death of a husband and child set itself before Evelyn. But after considering the question for a while, she put it aside, not daring to think it out, and listened instead to the Reverend Mother, who was speaking to her of what her life would be in the world if she were to return to it.

'You have said that to go back to the stage is out of the question, so I can only think of you as a music teacher. The money you gave to the convent cannot be returned to you unless all the nuns agree. I do not know if it could be managed.'

'Do not speak of such a thing. To put back the weight of debt on your shoulders which it was my mission to lift from them! If I were to do that then indeed my life would be deprived of all meaning whatever. It would be all quicksand—shifting sand. The redemption of this convent from debt is the one thing that I have accomplished. Under no circumstances could I ever take back the money. Never speak of it again.'

'My dear child, I should like to say you are very good, but this is not the moment for saying such things. Yet I think I can say that I do not believe God will allow anyone who is as good as you are, who desires goodness as ardently as you do, to leave the convent and start again in the miserable life of the world, where all is disappointment. We shall pray for you, and we have confidence in our prayers. They have been answered before.'

'I fear this return to the world. Outside of the convent what can my life be—the life of an obscure music teacher, half remembered and half forgotten—grey and shadow-like I shall pass—

"When I move among shadows a shadow, and wail by impassable streams."

My sole reality will be the convent. I shall never see you, dear Mother, nor any of the Sisters—Veronica, Mother Philippa, and Mother Mary Hilda, so gentle and wise, and yet I shall see nothing but you all, just as an exile sees nothing but his native land. I had often wondered before I came here what my end would be, and I imagined

all kinds of ends, but never one so shadowy as mine will be if I leave you. . . . The disgrace, too—undoing all the good that I have done, that seems the hardest part. It is my desertion you will remember ; not you, Mother, but the convent.'

The Prioress told Evelyn that when the Mothers met to discuss whether they should vote for, or against, her election, Mother Mary Hilda had advised her rejection until she had proved the reality of her vocation by remaining another year in the novitiate.

'But I always believed in your vocation, and I shall believe in it. God will guide us aright, and will listen to our prayers. But if it should so happen that you should feel your spiritual welfare to be endangered by remaining in the convent, you must leave—there can be no question of that. We must all be guided by our consciences. There is so much that we do not understand. We must always place ourselves in the hands of God.'

This admission seemed to disarm Evelyn, and the terrors of the night having worn off she began to think her fears were illusory, and that by strenuous efforts on her part and by the aid of the prayers of the nuns God would give back His grace to her.

The Prioress found wise words, and Evelyn agreed that a month was the shortest time she could give to the consideration of so irreparable an act as the breaking of her vows.

'Oh, the restlessness of life, and how weary I am of it!' she said, as they went downstairs, for the chapel bell was ringing for Benediction.

XXXVI

The fortitude which had enabled the Prioress to endure her life, after the death of her husband and her child, appealed to all that Evelyn admired most in human character, and she

looked at the old woman with affectionate and wondering eyes. The simple words in which she had described the shipwreck of her life enabled Evelyn to see it clearly, and she could picture the young woman, without a hope in this world, driving like a ship upon the rocks, but saving herself by extraordinary force of character. After the death of husband and child, the convent was the only consolation for a woman like the Prioress, and for nearly half a century her life had swung at anchor, like a ship in a safe harbour. Evelyn entered the chapel with her, realising the beauty of her serene age, and the wonder of her life in its faith and its romance. And under this influence Evelyn prayed a little while, and it seemed to her that the troubles of her life had faded from her. But before she had left the chapel, before even she had finished her prayer, her thoughts had strayed back to the sacrament. The faintly-burning lamp had drawn her thoughts back to it, and she could see it white and transparent amid the gold.

Did she believe? Yes, she believed, and that seemed the worst part of her misfortune. She did not wish to defile the sacrament; but she was persecuted by thoughts of how it might be defiled. In her dream Owen had put the Host into his handkerchief, and they were going to take it to her cell to defile it. She awoke as they were leaving the chapel, but the memory of this dream was unendurable, and she felt she could not rid herself of it without leaving the convent. To avoid blasphemy she must get away from the sacrament. To think of God she must go to some beautiful hollow in some delightful land. . . . As long as she stayed in the convent sin would be with her for a daily and nightly companion. Old sins would revisit her, and her calamity was the unexpectedness of these thoughts. She was weary of putting them back, and in sleep she was powerless against them. Her nights were poisoned by dreams, out of which she awoke —hollow eyed—in the blue dusk of dawn.

She had heard that our dreams are only the continuance of our thoughts at the moment of falling asleep. And though from the moment she got into bed she had prayed without ceasing, it was impossible for her to say

that some thought of Owen had not come into her mind, and that her dream was not the sequence of her waking thoughts, and for these she was responsible, and she asked why she should stay in the convent. The convent was a cause of sin, and she could no longer approach God in prayer, so she abstained from prayer, and her state grew more unhappy every day. Every day discovered new misgivings, finer subtleties, and despair settled gradually down on her. She lost control over her nerves, and all the old symptoms manifested themselves . . . sleepless nights and excessive consciousness of external things. She could see her life from end to end, distinct like an insect under a glass, and at night she noted the quiver of the antennæ as she lay staring into the darkness, or as she walked up and down her cell, afraid to go to sleep. Every argument she had heard against God floated through her brain, leaving her no rest. At half-past six, before she had closed her eyes, or slept at all, she would have to get up for meditation, and, worse than meditation, there was Mass, and worse than Mass was her watch before the sacrament. She had reached the point of denial, and she feared God while she denied God. Her eyes grew hollow, her skin pale, and her health deteriorated rapidly, and before the month of consideration which the Prioress had demanded from her had expired, she was unable to leave her cell. The Prioress came to see her there, but Evelyn could not answer her.

The Prioress said, 'You are certainly very ill, and we cannot accept the responsibility any longer.'

And the next day was appointed for Evelyn to declare that she wished to leave. One of the witnesses would be the chaplain; and Mother Philippa and Mother Mary Hilda, they would be witnesses too if necessary. But feeling that someone from outside, someone more important than the convent chaplain was required, the Reverend Mother wrote,—

'Dear Monsignor,—Your help is needed very sorely, and no one can help us in our extremity except you—if you can help us. I beg you to come here to-morrow, in the afternoon, about three o'clock, and I will explain

the whole matter to you. I am sure I have said enough for you to understand that no other engagement should prevent your coming here. Trusting in God that some way will be found out of our difficulty.—I remain.'

The prelate's face assumed a grave expression as he read the letter. He looked at and turned it over, and he said to himself, 'So it has come at last;' for he had no doubt the matter concerned Sister Teresa. 'It cannot be anything else,' he thought, 'except that she wishes to leave the convent.' He wrote several letters, adjourning some appointments he had made, and when he arrived at the convent he found the Prioress waiting to receive him in the parlour, and her face was so grave and sad that she need not have spoken. Then the chaplain entered the room, and the Prioress said,—

'I will tell Monsignor what has happened.'

He remembered of course the advice that he had given to the Prioress, when it was agitated whether Evelyn should be received into the convent, and he thought for a second of the Prioress's obstinacy, so he did not dare to say, 'Who could have foreseen this?' lest she might suspect his thoughts. And for the same reason he did not dare to say, 'We might have expected this.' So nothing was left for him to say except that it was very sad, and that he hoped that the mood would pass away.

The Prioress shook her head.

'I make no complaint; we all acted for the best, and apparently we have been mistaken.'

She rang a bell, and when the lay Sister appeared she told her to tell Sister Teresa to come to the parlour. 'Tell Sister Teresa nothing more than that I am waiting to see her in the parlour.

'Do you think,' Monsignor said, 'that my presence will influence her to remain here?'

'I don't know. I put my trust in God.'

The painful silence was broken by the opening of the door and Sister Teresa entered.

She had expected to see the Prioress and the chaplain; but when she saw Monsignor a personal look came into

her face, a mist collected in her eyes. She tottered a few steps, and she fell forwards, falling on the floor.

XXXVII

When she opened her eyes she was in the infirmary, and Veronica was sitting by her bedside, and when she asked where she was Veronica told her, and she said, 'Yes, I remember, I wanted to leave the convent life because I cannot believe in the sacrament.' Then, seeing Veronica's face change, she said, 'I should not tell you these things. What will the Reverend Mother say?' She closed her eyes, and when she opened them again she said, 'It is not that I do not believe in the sacrament, but because I do not believe as I wish to believe. Think of the sacrilege—I dread the sacrament because I am not sure; that is it, because I am not sure.'

'Sister Teresa, you must lie quite still and not talk. You have been very ill, and we thought you would die, but now you are a little better.'

'Veronica, you are one of the lucky ones; you came to the convent knowing nothing of the world.

'Sister Teresa, you must not speak; you will only make yourself worse.'

'But I cannot help speaking, for I cannot help thinking. . . . If I get worse I shall have to receive the sacrament or refuse it. Oh, what am I saying? What must you think of me?'

'Sister Teresa, you have been very ill, and if you will keep quiet you will get well.'

'I was an actress before I came here, and it was Monsignor who converted me. But why am I telling you these things?'

'I must not listen to you, Sister, I have my rosary to say.'

And while Veronica told her beads Evelyn babbled a little from time to time. She spoke of Ulick, who had taught her the music of 'Isolde'; she had not wished to learn it, but he had persuaded her to; and Evelyn continued, half in delirium, to talk about the Irish Princess and King Mark.

'How badly the nuns are singing and how ugly that hymn is. Close the window. If you do not I shall not remember what Isolde answers.' And so that she might not hear her Veronica joined in the hymn under her breath. 'Ah, you will not listen, you are afraid to listen to my music. Listen to it. It is much more beautiful than that hymn.'

She did not speak again for nearly half an hour. Looking towards Veronica, who was telling her beads, she said,—

'I have not been a success as a nun, but I cannot go back to the stage. You've drained all that out of me. I should be a failure if I went back—"among shadows a shadow." Shadows, shadows everywhere; but what is failure? It cannot be said that I have not striven, and perhaps it is the striving that counts. In the way of the world I am not a success, and in the way of the convent I am not a success. But I know one who saw God everywhere—in every flower, in every star, in all the interspaces—and maybe there is a judgment of which we know nothing, quite different from the judgment in the narrow hearts of men and of creeds.'

Then suddenly Evelyn cried out that God had forsaken her, and she began to sing some of the music from 'Isolde.' She was singing it when the Prioress came in, and she continued singing and babbling, only half-conscious of what was passing around her. The Prioress asked Mother Philippa if the doctor should be sent for, but before the Sub-Prioress could answer Evelyn declared that she must see him.

So there was no choice but to send for him, and when he had sat by her bedside and watched her he held out very little hope to the Prioress of her recovery.

Evelyn was at first anxious to know what he had said, then she did not seem to care, and it was difficult to get her

to take her food or medicine. She asked them not to trouble her with medicines. She seemed to desire death. Hour after hour she wasted away in intermittent delirium, and the convent for which she had given up so much seemed hardly to concern her at all. Sometimes she listened, hearing imaginary music, and she beat the time. Then the orchestra would be changed in her ears to a piano, and she would cry to her accompanist, 'Ah, there you have given me a wrong chord—begin again;' and she would sing fragments from 'Tristram' and 'Lohengrin.'

'I beseech you, Sister Teresa, listen to me, and cease to sing. You are making yourself very much worse, and I am responsible,' Veronica said.

The doctor's orders were that she should be kept perfectly quiet; but as he seemed to regard her life as practically lost, the Prioress took advantage of a sudden abatement in the delirium to ask her if she would like to see the chaplain. She spoke about confession, and communion, and besought her to make her peace with God.

'But, Mother, I am at peace with Him; so long as I do not communicate, I am at peace with Him. I am very weak, but I have no fear now.'

'But, my child, think of it, if you should die unreconciled to our holy Church. Will you see our chaplain?'

'Mother, I dare not. He will bring the sacrament with him. Oh, I'm so frightened. Do not ask me.'

'He will not bring the sacrament if you do not wish it.'

'He will talk to me about it. There is nothing to say.'

And the Prioress left her without having obtained her consent to see Father Matthews; but in the course of the morning she called Veronica and said she would like to see him.

'You have doubts, my dear child, I know, in the Real Presence of God in the sacrament.'

'I believe that God is everywhere.'

'Do you believe that God is more immediately in the sacrament than elsewhere?'

'Yes, since we have chosen the Eucharist as the symbol of our belief in the omnipresence of God.'

'But, my dear child, when life hovers, as it were, on the edge of death?'

'But, Father, I have no fear. I ought to have, perhaps, but I feel no fear. I feel that I have done my best.'

The priest could elicit no more definite declaration of adherence to Catholic dogma, and he left the infirmary perplexed. It seemed to him that he would not be able to administer the sacrament to her unless she was more intimately possessed by the dogma than her words would seem to indicate, and this point was discussed with Monsignor, who called that afternoon. But Monsignor was inclined to a more liberal comprehension of belief. Belief, he pointed out, was not a definite nor ponderable quality. It was impossible for anyone to assign limitations to their belief in God, and he seemed even to insinuate that there was no criterion of belief. The Church only required that the sinner should declare her submission to the teaching of the Church; but the quality of her belief in God and in the sacrament could only be assessed by God Himself.

'If Monsignor thinks so, there can be no further doubt. On a theological question I should be sorry to put forward my poor opinion against his. Perhaps then Monsignor will accept the responsibility.'

'But, my dear Father Mathews, I should be sorry . . .'

'No, no, I think it will be better so. You have influence with our dear Sister Teresa, which I have not; it was you who brought about her conversion, so it is then for you, Monsignor, to administer the sacrament, if she will accept it.'

This seemed to decide the matter, and Monsignor went to the infirmary with the Prioress; and Veronica, after bowing to Monsignor, gave him her chair by the bedside.

The eyes of the sick woman lighted up a little, and she said,—

'Monsignor, it is very good of you to come to see me. I am very ill, I feel it; it is better that I should die. I have given you all a great deal of trouble. I have never known myself; it is so difficult. I envy those who do; their lot is happier than mine.'

'But, my dear child, I would not have you speak of not knowing your own mind; I do not think anyone has ever known better than you. Very few have made the sacrifice that you have made. But they tell me you do not believe in the sacrament as much as they wish you to. I have confidence that your belief is sufficient.'

'It is not that I do not believe—they never quite understood me, but you will; it is that I am not sure, as I used to feel sure—you can have no idea how sure I once was, and the happiness my belief brought me was more than any other happiness. I believed once so intensely that everything else seemed like nothing. . . . The whole world was a shadow, and my belief was the one real thing in it. But that belief has passed from me. If I live I may regain it again; maybe I may regain it before I die, even without getting well.'

'My dear child, I see you have been troubled and am sorry for you, but you must not think any more. I feel sure you will feel happier after having received the sacrament. We're all so anxious on the subject, the Reverend Mother and the whole of the community.'

'Oh, Monsignor, I'm not happy enough, I'm not filled with the love of God, and if some wicked thought should cross my mind as you gave me the Host, I should die of fear. I might die with a dreadful thought in my mind, and next moment find myself face to face with God. Monsignor, I dare not, do not ask me. . . . The doctor said I was to be kept quiet.'

He did not answer her, and presently he thought it prudent to withdraw, and when the doctor called a little later he inquired from Veronica if she had been talking much, and if anything had happened to disturb her. Veronica told him that Monsignor had asked her if she would receive Holy Communion.

'And did she communicate?'

'No.'

The doctor's face darkened, and he murmured something about his orders being disobeyed, and afterwards in the parlour he told the Prioress that after the great mental strain Evelyn had been subjected to that afternoon he

could not answer for her recovery. But the Prioress was not in the least intimidated, and she answered that the sacrament was more important than any medicine, and that it brought greater quiet. The doctor answered that it was not his province to discuss such questions, and he told her he did not think Sister Teresa would outlast the day.

'In that case,' the Prioress said, 'I had better send for Monsignor, as she will have to receive Extreme Unction.'

The doctor shrugged his shoulders, feeling more sure than ever that his patient would not recover, and a message was sent to Veronica.

She drew forward a small table and covered it with a white cloth. She put the crucifix and holy water on the table, and a plate with some cotton wool in it, and then she turned back the bedclothes, leaving the feet bare. She had hardly finished when many footsteps were heard on the stairs and a little procession of nuns preceded the priest, and they all knelt about the bedside. Veronica, who was in charge of the ceremony, handed the priest what he needed swiftly and silently. The Prioress knelt close to Evelyn, and she recited the Confetior while Monsignor took the holy oil from a silver cruet and anointed the eyes, ears and nostrils. He wiped the anointed places with the cotton wool. The feet, long and very white, were then anointed and wiped, and their beauty was remarked, though everyone was in tears. The nuns wept silently, remembering that the dying woman had paid their debts. All jealousies and ingratitudes were regretted, and Evelyn heard the murmur of Latin prayers. As the nuns rose from their knees and were about to leave the cell, Evelyn opened her eyes, and after looking from one to the other, she turned her eyes to Monsignor and said,—

'Monsignor, will you hear my confession and give me communion?'

All withdrew, leaving Evelyn alone with the priest.

'Fearful thoughts about the sacrament have passed through my mind—not now; I am at peace now. I used to put them aside, but they returned almost immediately, and I could not pray, and it came to this, that I dared not sleep, so dreadful were my dreams. It seemed once that

I was losing my soul by remaining here. . . . I think I have said everything.'

Monsignor gave her absolution, and a moment after the chaplain arrived with the sacrament. Monsignor was handed the ciborium, and Veronica lifted Evelyn a little. There was little eagerness in her eye, but she received the Host reverentially, and Veronica laid her back on the pillow. Her eyes closed and it seemed to her that she was very tired, and that her sleep would be very long and dark and peaceful.

She heard the procession pass away, but she did not hear any more.

'Of course we must not wish her to die,' said Mother Hilda, 'but it would have been a terrible disgrace, and we must thank God for having saved us from it.'

The Prioress said,—

'She is not dead yet, and if she lives the struggle will begin again.'

XXXVIII

Veronica moved to her side, murmuring her prayers under her breath, she watched her face for some sign of life; but she lay quite still, and her stillness frightened the nun, and when the doctor called next day he seemed surprised to hear she was still alive. And for the next three or four days it was difficult to detect any change in her. But Nature never rests; change there always will be, though the differences from day to day escape our observation.

The summer heat exhausted her and seemed to delay her recovery, and it was not until the end of September that she was able to go into the garden that year. The autumn was a singularly beautiful one. The days were like July days, only shorter and a little cooler; and in the mornings she sat

on the terrace, watching the fading garden and the glittering skies. She thought she had never seen skies so beautiful before. There was a strange allurement in the blue; the skies reminded her of death—of some beautiful death, of something far away. The boughs no longer lifted themselves and danced to the light; they hung low as if burdened with the weight of leaves, and all the leaves were moveless in the moveless air.

September passed, and in October she noticed that the grass was tangled and wet—the dew had been heavy that night—and she had to keep to the gravelled path. The last sun-flowers blackened, and the chrysanthemums came out—strange growths of feverish, unnatural beauty. A night's frost had turned the beech tree in the middle of the garden from yellow to red orange, and the same frost stripped the ash of nearly all its fairy leaves.

The garden seemed to struggle against death just as Evelyn had struggled. The rose tree still tried to break to flower, but the outer leaves of the blossoms had been killed by the frost, and the buds could not open. Evelyn noticed that the geraniums she had planted in tubs and placed along the terrace hung lifeless and sapless. All the summer they had been pink and scarlet, and she regretted that no one during her illness had thought to take them into the potting-shed. 'If Sister Mary John had been here this would not have happened,' she said to herself, smiling plaintively.

And it was in this dying season that Evelyn began to regain her health. For the last fortnight she had been very happy. She had enjoyed the exquisite happiness of returning strength, of feeling herself able to walk a little further each day, of being able to do a little more; and her weakness saved her from thinking. A convalescent does not think; she yields herself to the sweet pressure of returning life, and it was not until the end of October, as she stopped in her walk to pity the neglected garden, as she stooped to free a tuft of pinks from some trailing nasturtium, that she suddenly remembered that she would never see the spring return to this garden again. She looked round for a stick to prop up some of the chrysanthemums, and she

saw their graveyard with its nine crosses, and she realised that if she were lying there her difficulty and the convent difficulty would be at an end. And as her strength returned the difficulty would grow more and more acute. Neither the danger she had escaped from nor her long convalescence had helped her to regain her faith. Her position regarding the dogma of transubstantiation was unchanged. When the priest raised the Host she believed that that was the divine flesh, that the wine in the chalice was the divine blood, that a change had come into the elements themselves in the words of consecration ; but now, standing in the middle of the garden, face to face with Nature, she could not believe that the Host she had seen that morning was the divine flesh of Him who created all things, she did not believe with that intense conviction with which she—a nun, a Passionist Sister—should believe. It was very likely that many Catholics did not get nearer to a sensible belief in the dogma than she did, but they were not nuns vowed to a perpetual adoration of the Host. It was terribly sad that she no longer believed as she once believed ; it was sad because she had sacrificed so much for this belief, and now when every sacrifice had been made she did not believe, or she did not believe enough, and her sacrifice was a vain one. No, not a vain one . . . even if she had to leave the convent. True that the difficulty lay still unsolved before her, and she almost wished that she had died, for it seemed to her that nothing but death could solve such a difficulty as hers and theirs.

As she watched the passing of the season she noticed that the nuns avoided her, that they looked at her askance, that they seemed frightened of her. She sighed, for the thought passed that there was good reason for their fear of her, for here she was an unbeliever—an unbeliever in a community vowed to perpetual adoration of the Host. She knew that, from the point of view of the nuns, nothing more awful could happen to them. In their hearts they must think of her as some chastisement sent by God. They could hardly think that ; God would not chastise them in such a way. His way would be a different way ; this was the devil's way. She could not imagine how they thought.

But she knew that the Prioress's illness had been attributed to her. The nuns could not but think that the fear of the scandal which Evelyn's departure would bring upon the convent had brought the Prioress to death's door. No one had told her so, but she guessed that the community was of one mind—or nearly so—on this point. She had no friends in the convent now except Mother Hilda and Veronica, and Veronica had let something slip the other day; and Evelyn pondered as she walked to and fro, seeing last night's rain dripping from the last leaves—it collected at the very end of the leaf and the great drop fell. Leaves were being blown about, there were little pools of water wherever there was a slight hollow in the path, and the nuns were throwing a ball from one to another with little joyous cries. Evelyn kept as much out of their sight as possible, fearing to jar their amusement. She wondered if they had forgotten their obligation to her, and she remembered that had it not been for her singing, their beautiful garden would have been taken away from them a long while ago, and villa residences would have overlooked the common. She walked round the fish-pond in the little plantation at the end of St Peter's Walk, and, listening to the trickling of the autumn water, she said,—

'No, they have not forgotten their obligation to me; they resent it.'

A few days after this idea received an unexpected confirmation. Sister Veronica told her that Sister Winifred had said that if the Prioress and Mother Hilda would only consent to a relaxation of the rule of the Order, they could make enough money out of a school to pay Evelyn the eight thousand pounds which she had brought to the convent.

'Then they want to get rid of me.'

'No, I don't think they want to get rid of you. I shouldn't put it exactly that way. It is you, Sister, who want to leave, and of course we should not like to keep the money you gave us.'

The garden was full of nuns. Some were walking quickly, for though the sun was shining the air was chill.

Others had begun a game of ball; Evelyn thought she would like to join in it, but she was afraid they would not care to play with her, and it was at that moment that the aged Prioress came up to speak to her.

'I do not know if you are strong enough to give me your arm,' she said.

'Oh, yes, dear Mother, I am quite strong now.'

'Your strength has returned, Teresa, but mine will not return. I shall barely see another year. Oh, I know it,' she added, seeing that Evelyn was about to contradict her.

Evelyn did not dare to speak, for she suddenly remembered that the belief of the convent was that she had hastened the Prioress's end. On account of the old woman she had to walk very slowly. The Prioress was now hardly more than a little handful, and her strength was a dying bird's. They had not taken many steps before they had to sit down, and something told Evelyn that the moment had come for her to speak to the Prioress about her departure. But she had only to look at the old woman to see that it was impossible to mention such a subject to her. Life seemed to flutter as fitfully in her as in any of the leaves dancing on the stems. A leaf had just fallen at Evelyn's feet, another was dancing merrily and might hold on a long while, so it was with the Prioress—she might live far into the winter. She had come to speak to her, and Evelyn waited for her to speak, trembling with anticipation.

The Prioress said not a word, and Evelyn heard the childish laughter of the nuns and the wind thrilled through her habit.

At last the silence became too acute, and she said,—

'Mother, I have escaped from death as by a miracle, but it would have been better, if I had died, for myself and for you. Think, I might be sleeping yonder, under the white crosses.'

'If you did not die, my dear child, it was because God did not will it. Doubtless He did not think you prepared for death, and He resolved to leave you a little longer. God is very good, and He is merciful to those who have loved Him.'

'But, Mother, I have never ceased to love God.'

'We do not judge you, my dear daughter; we all pray for you. We pray for you, and we feel that our prayers will be granted.'

'It is not well for you, Mother, to sit in this cold wind. Had you not better walk a little way?'

'I am rested now.'

And as they walked towards the terrace, Evelyn said,—

'I have caused you pain and suffering. Maybe it is I who am killing you, Mother. My life seems to have been all suffering. I have desired to do right; it seems that I have failed even here. The others cannot understand, but you can, you do understand, Mother.'

'I am older than the others, I am very old, and in old age it is the mind that sees. We are praying for you, my dear child, for we know by instinct when a member of our community is in danger.'

She spoke out of the mystery of age and out of her long convictions, and then Evelyn knew that she could not leave the convent as long as this old woman lived. When she died the closest tie which held her to the convent would be broken, and she resolved to escape as soon as she could after the Prioress's death. She had considered the various ways of escape that were open to her, for she could not face the will of the convent again; her escape must be clandestine. And the way of escape that seemed most feasible was through the front door when the portress left her keys on the nail.

The journey to London in her habit would be disagreeable and difficult. It would be difficult because she had no money; nuns have no money. She might have to walk all the way, and when she got to London she did not know where she would go nor how she could get any money. She remembered Owen and she remembered Ulick, but she would go to neither, and she imagined herself knocking at Louise's door. She thought of herself standing in Louise's drawing-room in her habit, but she did not smile.

She looked at the Prioress, and the conviction awakened in her that she would not have to wait long,

and then she thought of herself, and she asked herself if she possessed sufficient courage to begin life afresh.

XXXIX

The autumn passed into an early winter, and Evelyn caught a cold which clung to her, and it prevented her from singing at Benediction. It seemed to her that the the nuns were glad that she could not sing, but the Prioress said that she missed her singing, and it seemed to her sad that the Prioress should not hear her; very soon the Prioress would hear no more music, and Evelyn sang in spite of her ailing throat.

One day she found she had no voice left. A specialist came from London to examine her throat; he said that she had been very imprudent, he prescribed, and said that perhaps with a couple of years' rest she might be able to sing again. But Evelyn did not believe him; she knew that her voice had gone from her as her mother's had gone; her voice had left her in the very middle of a piece of music, and in the middle of an opera her mother had lost her voice.

And now that the irreparable had happened the nuns were sorry for her, in a way, though she doubted if any one of them, except perhaps the Prioress, Mother Hilda and Veronica, would give her back her voice if it were in their power to give it.

Her plan had been to leave the convent soon after the Prioress's death. She had intended to sing in concerts and oratorios, and to live as economically as possible, and it would not be difficult for her to live economically after her experiences in the convent. Her expenses would consist principally of a few dresses, her rooms would cost her about fifteen shillings a week, and

with one little serving-maid she would be able to limit her expenditure to two hundred pounds a year, and her calculation was that she might earn twelve hundred a year. So she would be putting by every year one thousand pounds and when she had saved seven or eight thousand pounds she looked forward to buying the cottage and the large garden, the home for the six little crippled boys that she had written to Monsignor about. She had looked forward to this as the end of her life; it was to be the inevitable packing up that comes to us all sooner or later, the final arrangement. She had believed that all this would happen, for it seemed so natural, so like what would happen, given the circumstances of her life. It had never seemed quite natural to her that her life should end in this convent amid these very good but very childish nuns. The loss of her voice had destroyed all hope of this little dream of hers; the dream had seemed very real while it lasted, but a simple accident, a month's singing with an ailing throat, had made it as impossible as any dream of fairyland. If she were to leave the convent, and she certainly would have to leave it, the end would be quite different; the only end she could see for herself now was to be a singing mistress, a music teacher. She could see herself living in some distant suburb, coming up to town third class in wet months and cold months, and giving lessons for a few shillings an hour. Her stage career had been forgotten; she had not been long enough on the stage to be remembered. Three or four shillings an hour was the highest remuneration she could expect. Maybe she could succeed in making three hundred pounds a year; if she did that she would be very lucky, for then she would have a margin which she could apply to some charitable purpose, to some less expensive charity than the home for the little children. Well, she must be content with that.

At that moment the Prioress called her. The old woman had awakened suddenly, and not hearing the sound of her pen had asked her what she was doing. Evelyn excused herself. For some months she had been acting as the Prioress's secretary—they were writing to-

gether the history of the convent—but the Prioress's memory was failing; she could not answer Evelyn's questions, and Evelyn had to get up to search for some documents.

As she looked for the documents she suddenly remembered Owen Asher; they would be sure to meet sooner or later if she left the convent. The question was, How would they meet? For the moment she was unable to find any answer to this question, but gradually the thought came that they would meet almost as strangers, and this thought gradually settled into profound conviction. For how otherwise could they meet except as strangers? She had changed beyond his powers of recognition. All that she had been was dead; all that he knew her by was dead. Men do not wish to make love to nuns; a nun could never be more than a shadow. The body would be there, but there would be a look in the eyes that would tell of leagues immeasurable. She could easily imagine the meeting. He would ask from her an account of herself; she would tell him of the convent. He would try to be kind, but when she told him that she had lost her voice, neither would know what to say next.

Ulick would recognise her better, for they had been always going towards the same end, though by different roads, and she wondered what progress he had made in the spiritual life. He stirred her imagination a little, but she was able to overcome it, and she knew that he would be able to forego sensual love more easily even than she would, notwithstanding her five years in the convent, notwithstanding her vows. He would want her to marry him, and she shrank from the thought, remembering that she was the bride of Christ. But she would always be interested in his ideas, and she regretted her voice for his sake; perhaps enough voice would come back for her to sing to him in the evenings. She wondered what music he had written, if he had finished 'Grania.' How far away all these things seemed now!

It was the wish of the old woman who lay dying in her chair that the history they were writing should be finished before she died. Her eyes were strangely dim, and her

flesh was grey. She looked like a night light burning low in the socket. But her mind was clear, though the flame flickered on the edge of darkness, and Evelyn often grew afraid that the old nun divined her intention of leaving the convent. The dim eyes seemed to see through her; they seemed to see into the very background of her mind. As death approaches the mind sees; and Evelyn trembled. But the Prioress asked no questions. She seemed to Evelyn to acquiesce in her departure. She seemed to have no more fear for Evelyn's soul than for her own, and this was a great consolation to Evelyn.

Nevertheless, there were times when Evelyn's conscience nearly overpowered her, and she longed to throw herself at the Prioress's feet and beg her forgiveness, pledging herself to stay in the convent, and she felt that if that pledge were given she would keep it. Her knees dwindled under her, and her lips were about to speak; but at that moment, as if divining her intention, the Prioress asked her to stir the fire, for she was getting cold. And as she made up the fire Evelyn gave thanks that she had not spoken, for such a confession would surely have embittered the Prioress's end, and Evelyn knew that the end was assuaged and made happy by her presence. She knew the Prioress loved her, and she knew that she loved the Prioress with the same kind of passionate love with which she had worshipped her father.

XL

When the Prioress died Evelyn's life seemed a figment, and life, whether she remained in the convent or left it, seemed to her to be equally unbearable. The anguish was heightened in her by the rites, by the black cloths, by the chants, and by the unconsciousness of Nature. A keen wind was blowing, and the sky brightened at intervals as the procession moved through the gardens. The bare trees were shaken,

and she desired to wave innocently in the air as they did, to mingle with the beautiful, peaceful earth; the earth seemed the only peaceful thing, and she longed to join it and to partake once again of its dark and happy life.

In losing the Prioress she had lost everything, the others had only lost a Prioress, who would be replaced by another Prioress, and a new conviction of her loneliness awoke in her when she knelt by the newly-made grave. She remembered Sister Mary John, whom she would never see again. Even God seemed to have deserted her, yet she had made many sacrifices for Him.

When she announced that she would not vote for the new Prioress the nuns viewed her still more coldly. They asked her if she thought that none among them was worthy to fill the place of the late Prioress. Or did she feel no further interest in the welfare of the convent. Evelyn answered that the choice of the new Prioress would probably decide whether the rule of the order should be widened, whether they should cut themselves off from the Mother House in France, and that she would like to avoid the responsibility of taking sides.

'But,' said Sister Winifred, 'no one has a right to shirk her responsibility; that is why we elected you a choir Sister.'

She could not vote—on that point her resolution did not seem to admit of any change; the nuns continued to press her, and she did not like to remind them that she had freed the convent from debt, in order that it might remain a contemplative order. As she hesitated, Sister Winifred came to her rescue, saying,—

'Sister Teresa has no doubt very good reasons for abstaining from voting.'

Evelyn's defection left little doubt in Sister Winifred's mind that Mother Philippa would be elected, and in that case the new buildings would be finished before a year was out, a school would be in progress, and before ten years the conversion of Wimbledon to Rome would be an accomplished fact. The few nuns who still clung to the ancient tradition of the order could offer no serious opposition to so constant an energy as Sister

Winifred's. Mother Philippa was elected Prioress, and at the end of the month the subject of conversation during the morning recreations was the possibility of obtaining the Bishop's consent to their separating themselves from the Mother House in France and entering upon scholastic activity. Monsignor, who had just returned to England, was sent for, and it was hoped he would use his very great influence with his lordship.

'Where, for instance,' the Prioress said to him, 'could parents get children taught as they could here? But I am very sorry to say that Sister Teresa lost her voice this winter; we miss her voice sadly at Benediction, but for teaching it won't matter in the least, and then she is an excellent pianist, she can even teach composition.' Monsignor sympathised with the sublime idea that a constant stream of petitions was necessary to save this world from the wrath of God, but at the same time it did not seem to him that a school would seriously infringe upon the tradition of the order. He spoke volubly for some minutes, partly in the hopes of distracting Evelyn's attention from the Reverend Mother's remarks concerning her, which had seemed to him injudicious. At the same moment Evelyn was thinking how, just as she had finished her work, it had undone itself, it had just crumbled away, and she saw it scattering like a little heap of dust. True it was that she was leaving the convent, but she did not wish the idea abandoned—the idea that she had striven for; she wished it to be carried on by others; she knew herself to be weak, she knew she must fall out of the ranks, but her belief in the ideal was unimpaired. And she thought of these things as she calculated the height of the garden walls, as she listened to Mother Philippa telling Monsignor the price they would charge for boarders and for non-boarders, and the advantages that such a school would offer to the villa residents. But before she could leave the convent she must finish the Prioress's book. Her promise to the Prioress to finish her history of the convent, its story as it had existed under her headship, had become sacred to Evelyn, and the unfinished manuscript was the last tie that bound her to the convent. She had hoped to finish it in six weeks or a month, but the book was not

yet finished; new difficulties arose, and the old difficulties seemed insuperable, and this manuscript which she worked at day after day became like some redoubtable secret enemy. 'If I do not write I shall never get away from here,' she cried to herself in the silent cloisters, and raising her eyes from the paper she thought of herself as of a prisoner scraping her way through an unending wall.

She went about her avocations—a quiet nun, gentle, almost demure; her resolution to escape deep in her heart, and the nuns began to think she had at last become like themselves. Only at recreation did she try to avoid the rule. If it were fine the nuns sat in a circle in the shade of a favourite tree, and gossiped about little external pieties—the lighting of candles and the repainting of the statuettes, and to appear interested in these conversations had always been the greatest of Evelyn's conventual difficulties, and now it seemed more difficult than ever. One day they were babbling of the advantage it would be to them if some of their pupils distinguished themselves in painting or in music when they left the convent. Sister Winifred cast down her eyes and blushed, and Evelyn felt they could talk better without her. She availed herself of this little incident to steal away.

To walk by herself in the sun, in the evening light, thinking of the dead Prioress, or of the nun who had gone away because she could not endure her love, seemed like happiness, and she felt she could be happy in the convent if her friends could be given back to her. When they were with her the convent was a pure aspiration, meagre and a little grey, perhaps, but still pure and true. And while thinking of the grey pieties of the cloister her eyes turned to the sun-setting. The sunset seemed to steal into her heart, and to become a source of secret joy to her. She wondered what was the influence of the sun; it made the woods grow green and the flowers blossom, it drew all things into itself, the rays darted from the horizon to the zenith, and she stood at the highest point of the garden watching the light, breathless and delighted. She saw the beautiful earth quiescent like a nun watching before the sacrament. The plants lifted their leaves to the light.

Everything knew it, even the stones in the centre of the earth; she watched the distant woods submerged in the light of the sun; her soul dilated and knew its light; the shell broke which till now had darkened it from her; her flesh and spirit seemed to become one with it; her immortal spirit seemed to ascend into the immortal light; her eyes seemed to see into the depths of the sea, and her ears were soothed by the murmur of the waves.

The great secret was revealed; she understood the mysterious yearning which impels us in turn to reject and to accept life; and she had learnt these things merely by watching the flowers raising their leaves to the light.

She sat down in the grass and watched a sun-flower till it seemed a sentient being whose silent adoration of its distant shepherd in the heavens was turning it into the likeness of the glory it longed to reach. She closed her eyes to imagine it better, and the sun-flower in her thoughts grew and expanded, and went upwards to the brimming love which gave it life; and the imagined ecstasy of the meeting thrilled her heart, and she remembered that yesterday the elevation of the Host had left her unmoved. Why was it that the mere sight of a flower evoked a vanished sweetness which no ritual could awaken in her? And in another moment of revelation she knew that to seek the Real Presence on the altar alone is a denial of the Divine Being elsewhere, and she felt the door would be closed to her until in every mood and in every place she could recognise the sacrament as an eternal act in nature.

She was wakeful that night, but in the darkness there was light, and she felt that it had come to lead her out as it had led her into the convent, for there are not two lights, but one light.

Her book was finished, and she awaited her opportunity —her opportunity was the accident that Sister Agnes should be called away suddenly and leave her keys on the nail; and the little porteress rarely left her door, and when she did her keys were at her girdle. Winter passed into spring and Evelyn still waited, and she sometimes said 'if the opportunity does not occur soon I shall not have the strength,' and she asked herself if she would have the strength to

begin life again. The weeks went by, and one day in April the porteress passed her in the passage, the keys were not at her girdle, and Evelyn walked down the Georgian hall and down the covered way, and taking the keys from the nail she opened the door.

At that moment the pigeons left their roosts and flew towards the fields. The fields were shining in the morning light; thrush and cuckoo were calling, the spring moved among the first primroses, and Evelyn stood watching the spring-tide.

She had only to take a step to regain her life in the world, but she could not take that step. She no longer even seemed to desire it. In the long months she had been kept waiting a change had taken place in her. She felt that something had broken in her, and she closed the door, and having locked it she hung the keys on the nail.

And walking up the covered way, dimly aware that she was walking, she remembered that she would soon come to the end of the covered way, and would meet Sister Agnes returning to her post. And then she remembered that she had left something undone in the sacristy, and she returned there quickly and began to arrange some flowers for the Virgin's altar.

XLI

In the middle of the following year Mademoiselle Heilbron called to see her, and Teresa came into the parlour, and with ready smiles and simple glee she entered into conversation with her old friend.

'But may we not go into the garden?'

'But, of course, certainly.'

A little embarrassed to know what to say to her, Louise talked to her about a new part in a new opera by a new composer.

'I've brought the score with me. Would you like to see it? Shall I leave it?'

Teresa said that once she would have liked to see it, but now such things were far behind her, and with a merry laugh she spoke of herself as a broken spirit. And then, as if speaking out of some vague association of ideas, she spoke of her pupils—of one who really had an aptitude for the piano, and another who could really sing a little. She would like Louise to hear her, and Louise was not certain if she were speaking in bitterness or in jest, or if her present mind was her natural mind.

They walked a little way in silence, and then Louise said,—

'And you are quite happy now that you have put life aside, now that you have decided that there is nothing better for you to do in life than to teach the piano and solfège?'

'Dear Louise, all things are of equal importance; it matters nothing whether we are teaching little children or doing the things that the world thinks glorious. The important thing to do is to live, and we do not begin to know life, taste life, until we put it aside. This sounds like a paradox, but it is a simple little truth. Life is the will of God, and to enter into the will of God we must forget ourselves, we must try to live outside ourselves in the general life.'

'But what is the will of God?'

'What is your own breath, Louise? You cannot explain it, and yet it is yourself. And there are times when the will of God seems as near to us as our own breath.'

'I think I know what you mean, but if I were to live here I should kill myself.'

'When I was on the stage I often used to think of killing myself. I did not fear death at all, for life seemed so trivial, but now I do not want to die, I should like to live on and on. So long as we live in the will of God, it does not seem to matter where we live, whether we live in this world or in heaven.'

They walked round the garden twice, carrying on the

conversation as best they could. Louise remarked a nun reading her Office, and Teresa told her who she was. Louise affected an interest in the flowers, and Teresa told Louise she must hear her favourite pupil.

'I really don't think you will be disappointed, she has got a very pretty voice, and I have just taught her a song out of one of Handel's operas.'

'I remember a song of Handel's that you used to sing beautifully. Do you ever sing it now?'

'No, I lost my voice last winter; a heavy cold took it all away,' and Teresa laughed just as she had laughed when she spoke of herself as a broken spirit, and Louise left the convent uncertain, thinking that perhaps it was this loss of her voice that had decided her to remain in the convent.

'So this is the last stage,' she said as she drove back to London. And then Louise thought of her own life. She was now forty-five, she might go on singing for a few years—then she, too, would have to begin her packing up, and she wondered what her end would be.

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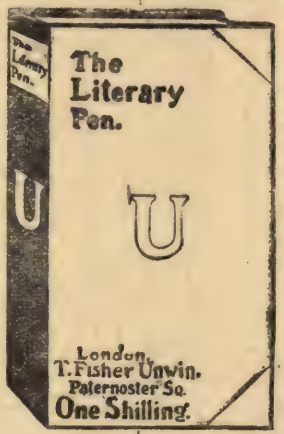

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